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# THE ROCKIES

A. MAYNARD BARBOUR

FRED LOCKLEY  
RARE WESTERN BOOKS  
1243 East Stark St.  
PORTLAND, ORE.

To Quaker bus

As taken of Esfer  
from

The Author

1898.

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# TOLD IN THE ROCKIES

**A Pen Picture of the West.**

BY

A. MAYNARD BARBOUR.

"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."—Ecc. vii, 8.

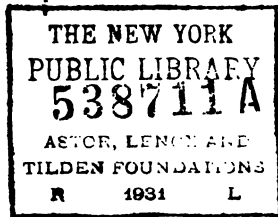


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IN



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## DEDICATION.

To W. James Barbour,

My co-worker in this pleasant task,  
at whose suggestion it was undertaken,  
and by whose inspiration it has been guided,  
from inception to completion,  
this book is affectionately dedicated

by the author,

A. MAYNARD BARBOUR.

*Fred Lockley 6 May 1931*





# TOLD IN THE ROCKIES.

By A. Maynard Barbour.

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## CHAPTER I.

The Pacific Express was due at Valley City at 1:45 p. m. Within ten minutes of that time, a spring-board wagon, containing two young men and drawn by a pair of bronchos, suddenly appeared around one end of the dingy little depot. One of the men, dressed in a tweed traveling suit, jumped hastily from the wagon, while the other, who looked like a prosperous young ranchman, seemed to have all he could attend to in holding the restive little ponies, who were rearing and kicking in their impatience at being compelled to stand.

"I'm afraid, Ned," he said, "that you'll have to look out for your traps yourself; these little rats haven't been driven for four days, and they're feeling pretty frisky."

"All right, Tom," responded the other, diving under the seat of the spring-board and bringing out the said "traps," which consisted of two grips, a rifle case, a set of fishing rods, and, last but not least, a large, square case which he handled with great care, and now held up to his companion saying,

"See that, Tom? that's my set of cameras; they're fine too, I tell you."

"But why do you bother to take them around with you all the time, like that?" inquired his friend.

"Oh," replied Ned, "I do that so as to be ready to catch any choice scenes I come across; I'm making a collection of views, you know, and I expect to get a good many on

this trip. By the way, I got some stunning views over there at your place this morning, just before breakfast."

"The dickens, you did!" exclaimed Tom, suddenly remembering a ludicrous predicament in which his guest had caught him.

"Oh, yes," said Ned, "and when I get away at a safe distance I'm going to develop them and send them to you. I've got an awfully fine—well, by Jove, if that isn't just my luck!"

Ned had just deposited his belongings on the depot platform and in doing so, noticed a piece of blackboard propped up against the wall, on which were chalked these words, "Train 3 ours late." His eyes seemed riveted to the spot.

"What's the matter now?" asked Tom, who took in the situation at a glance.

"Matter! Why, that blasted train is three hours behind time."

"Too bad!" said Tom, with a grin; "if I'd only known that I needn't have driven my horses so hard."

"Oh, confound those little beasts of yours," exclaimed Ned, "a little exercise won't hurt them, but to think of three hours in a place like this! and say, don't you know how to spell out here?"

"Well," said Tom, coolly, "I don't hold myself personally responsible for the wording of that blackboard, but I suppose that's the phonetic spelling they used to talk about when I lived east; you see we've adopted it out here, for we westerners have to rustle lively, and don't have time for old-fashioned ways."

"I see," said Ned, rather sarcastically; "perhaps you can tell me why they don't 'rustle' that train along on time."

"I suppose," replied Tom, "it's on account of that wreck two days ago; you know your train was ten hours late yesterday."

"Yes," assented Ned, gazing about him with an expression of intense disgust; "I got here after dark; that's how it comes about that I never realized until the present moment what a paradise this place is. Valley City! I can't see more than a dozen buildings here."

"That's probably because you're so near-sighted, my dear boy," replied Tom; and Ned, who was very sensitive on the subject of his near-sightedness, colored, and re-adjusted his eye-glasses, while he asked in a tone of despair:

"Well, what am I to do in this beastly place, anyhow?"

"You might take a stroll about the city," suggested Tom, "if you get lost you'll have to inquire your way of some of the police. I would be delighted to stay and keep you company, but work on the ranch is rushing and I must hurry back; so I'll wish you good luck and good-bye."

"All right, old fellow," said Ned, shaking hands in a slightly patronizing way, "if you ever get out of this country, and find yourself within the limits of civilization again, just take a run down to the 'Hub' and see me."

"Much obliged," said Tom, turning around for a parting shot; "I say, Ned, while you're waiting for the train, you'd better get out your cameras; you might catch some more 'stunning views' you know," and lightly snapping his whip, he started off, the bronchos standing on their forefeet with their heels in the air.

"Good-bye, Tom," Ned called, after the rapidly retreating spring-board, "if you ever had any brains to lose I'd be anxious about you, but I guess you're safe enough."

Tom's only reply was a crack of the whip, and he and the ponies soon disappeared in a cloud of dust, leaving Ned to survey his surroundings at his leisure.

In the foreground was the low, dingy depot, and on the platform, leaning against the building as though their spinal columns were unable to support them, were two specimens of the genus homo, which were entirely new to the young Bostonian. He gazed at them with undisguised interest, being unable to determine whether they were cow-boys or miners, these being the two classes into which, as he imagined, the western population was about evenly divided. That they immediately classified him, in their western vernacular, as a "tenderfoot," and a remarkably verdant specimen at that, was not owing to their superior penetration, as it was a self-evident fact.

Mr. Edward B. Rutherford, Jr., prided himself upon be-

ing a resident of Boston, a son of one of her best families, and a graduate of Harvard, and it is scarcely to be wondered at if he felt himself slightly superior to ordinary mortals who had not been blessed with these advantages. Nevertheless, the fact remained that Mr. Rutherford's personal appearance could not be considered especially prepossessing, even when moving in his own sphere where he felt himself, as he would have expressed it, "en rapport" with his surroundings; under other circumstances, as at the present time, it very nearly approached the ludicrous. He was small in stature, but his bump of self-esteem was developed in an inverse ratio to his size. He seemed to be making a constant effort to maintain his dignity at the proper level, in which direction he was greatly assisted by a pair of eye-glasses, perched on a very large and decidedly Roman nose. It had been claimed by his college chums that the eye-glasses were worn for this especial purpose; be that as it may, without their assistance, his task would certainly have been a difficult one, as his eyes, which were very full and round, and surmounted by a pair of extremely high-arched eyebrows, gave him always an expression of exaggerated surprise and bewilderment, which, when intensified as on the present occasion, rendered his appearance very far from the *otium cum dignitate* to which he aspired. But upon very few is the "giftie" bestowed, "to see oursel's as ithers see us," and to many besides the junior Mr. Rutherford, such a vision would be anything but satisfactory.

At the present time, however, Rutherford's only troubles were his immediate surroundings, and the problem of how to pass the next three hours. The loungers, who by this time had changed to a sitting posture, and who were staring at him with an unwinking fixedness which made him rather nervous, did not seem very congenial companions. The town consisted of merely a few, straggling, unpainted buildings, while in every direction extended the apparently interminable stretches of undulating prairie, partially covered with sage brush and wild cactus. Though early in the season, the heat was intense, and the glare of the sunlight reflected from the patches

of white, chalk-like sand, was so blinding as to seem unendurable.

The interior of the depot was even more cheerless than the exterior. A rusty stove, minus one leg, two or three battered benches, a flaming circus poster, and an announcement of the preceding year's county fair constituted the entire furnishing and decoration. No signs of life were visible, the window into the ticket office being closed, while from somewhere within the little inclosure, a telegraphic instrument clicked with a cheerful pertinacity that to Rutherford seemed simply exasperating.

In the course of half an hour, however, the monotony was relieved by the appearance of half a dozen soldiers, who strolled over from a neighboring fort, about two miles distant. Rutherford had soon introduced himself to them, with a formality which they considered highly amusing, and they entertained him with tales of various thrilling adventures and hair breadth escapes, nearly all invented for the occasion, to which he listened with an open-mouthed astonishment that elicited many winks and grins from the blue-coats. Finally, two of them escorted him to a small Indian camp, about a mile distant, which was hidden from view by a sandy knoll, where, in some cottonwood brush, beside a small creek, they found half a dozen tepees, around which were squatted twenty or thirty disreputable-looking Indians, their ponies tethered in the brush near by. The bucks were sullen and uncommunicative, maintaining a solemn silence broken only by an occasional grunt. Their dress was a combination of Indian costume and articles purchased from the white people, the latter being put on to suit the individual taste of the wearer, without the least regard to the use for which it was originally intended. One, who seemed a leader in the camp, in addition to his native toggerly of feathers, beads and brass rings, wore trousers of striped bed-ticking, two or three pairs of gayly colored suspenders knotted together for a belt and sash, and a flaming red necktie braided in his hair. The squaws in their blankets were quite socially inclined, and the wig-wams at a little dis-

tance looked very romantic to the young easterner, but the odors wafted from them were sufficient for him, and he declined to penetrate any further into the mysteries of an Indian camp; and after taking one or two views of the Indians and their tepees, he returned to the depot.

It was now nearly train time, and the number of loungers and loafers had increased amazingly, considering the size of the town. There were thirty or forty of them, all more or less resembling the first specimens, and Rutherford wondered where they stowed themselves away, not realizing that many came in from little shacks scattered over the prairies; for to them, the coming of the train from the east was the one great event of the day.

Among them Rutherford noticed a man, who, though clad as roughly as the others, yet had an individuality so distinct from them as to be noticeable even to a stranger. He wore an old soft hat and rough blouse, his trousers being tucked into a pair of heavy, hobnailed boots that reached to his knees. He was tall and stooped slightly, but there was none of the slouching figure and gait that characterized those around him. His movements were quick, and, when standing motionless, there was something in his very pose that conveyed an impression of alertness and of latent strength. His back was turned toward Rutherford, who was watching him under a sort of subtle fascination, when suddenly he wheeled, facing him. His eyes were keen and piercing, and as he looked for an instant at Rutherford with an expression of suspicion and distrust, and then seemed to survey his diminutive figure with a quick glance of contempt, that young man felt a sudden and violent terror in his inmost soul, which was not lessened when his eyes fell upon a sheath knife and huge revolver in the stranger's belt. Involuntarily Rutherford's hand went to his hip pocket, where reposed a dainty, pearl-handled Smith and Wesson, 38-calibre, but he immediately regretted the movement, for the blue-black eyes watching him scintillated for a moment with a cold, steel-like glitter, and the lips under the heavy, black beard

curled with a smile of fine scorn, that made our young hero exceedingly uncomfortable.

The whistle of the approaching train afforded him unspeakable relief, and at the first opportunity he put himself and his belongings aboard with a celerity very remarkable in one of his usual dignity.

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## CHAPTER II.

As the Pacific Express was speeding westward across the prairies, a young man, half reclining among the cushions of the smoking car, was enjoying a choice Havana. He took no note of external objects as they flashed with almost lightning rapidity past the car windows, and he seemed equally unconscious of the presence of his fellow passengers. His dress and manner, as well as his nonchalant, graceful attitude, and even the delicate poise of his cigar, were all indicative of wealth and refinement, and of a courtesy innate, not acquired. His head was slightly thrown back, and with half-closed, dreamy eyes, he watched the coils of blue smoke wreathing and curling above his head, but his mind was actively engaged in planning the details of the new life opening up before him in the west. Walter Everard Houston, of New York, the possessor of a million in his own name, and prospective heir to many millions more, was en route for a small mining camp, far west, in the heart of the Rockies, where he was to fill the position of book-keeper and corresponding secretary in the office of a mining company, at a salary of one hundred dollars per month.

Mr. Houston's parents had died when he was very young, and he had been tenderly reared in the home of his uncle, his mother's brother, Walter Everard Cameron. Even now, as he watched the blue coils above his head, his memory was going back to the time when he had entered that beautiful home. He recalled the different members of that lovely family, as they then appeared to him; the dark, patrician face of his aunt,



with its wondrous beauty, which, in the following years had been so softened and deepened by sorrow that now it was almost saint-like in the calm look of peace and love which it wore, with the soft, snow-white hair surrounding it like a halo of glory. Then his beautiful cousin Edna, with her sunny hair and starry eyes, and her wonderful voice filling the home with music. She had married soon after he entered the family, and went with her husband to a distant, western city, often returning to visit the old home. How well he remembered the last visit! Her baby was then nearly two years old; he could not now recall her name, but she was a little, golden-haired toddler, with her mother's eyes and voice. His cousin was suddenly called home by a telegram that her husband was ill; then, in a day or two, came the news of a frightful railroad accident, a collision and a fire which quickly consumed the wreck. Edna was rescued from the flames, unconscious and dying, but no trace could be found of the little one. Then followed word of the death of Edna's husband; he had died a few hours later than the accident occurred, ignorant of the terrible fate of his wife and child.

Next came the memory of his cousin, Guy Cameron, but a few years older than himself; dark and beautiful like his mother, proud spirited and headstrong, the pride of his parents, but through him came their most bitter sorrow. Through fast living and gambling he became deeply involved, and forged his father's name to several checks, amounting to nearly a hundred thousand; then, overcome by shame and remorse, he had fled in the night, no one knew whither. His father payed the full amount of the debt, without even betraying his son's guilt, and then for years employed the most skillful detectives, trying to bring back the wanderer to the love and forgiveness which awaited him; but in vain, no trace of him existed. The father had long ago given up all hope of ever seeing his boy again, and doubted whether he were living. Only the sweet-faced mother, strong in her mother-love and in her faith in God, believed that he would yet return, and was content to watch and wait.

Meantime, Everard Houston had become like a son

to Mr. and Mrs. Cameron. After leaving college, he had been taken by his uncle as a partner into his enormous banking house, and intrusted more or less with the charge of various departments of business with which he was connected, and he had proven himself worthy of the trust reposed in him.

For a number of years, Mr. Cameron had been president of a large investment company, which, among other properties, owned a number of mines in the west which had been represented to be very valuable, and which, at the time of purchase, possessed every indication of being heavy producers of very rich ore. Lately, these mines had not been yielding the profit which it was reasonable to expect from them, and there were indications of bad management, if not of dishonesty, at the western end of the line. One or two so-called experts had been sent out to investigate, but they had after all so little knowledge of practical mining, that they were unable to produce any tangible evidence against the company who constituted their western agents, although their reports had only tended to strengthen Mr. Cameron's belief that there was underhanded and dishonest dealing somewhere, which could only be detected by a person on the ground whom the western company would not suspect of being personally interested. Happening to learn, through a Chicago firm who were friends of Mr. Cameron's, that the western company were desirous of getting a bookkeeper and confidential clerk, it was decided, after consultation, to send out Everard Houston to take this position. Accordingly, he had gone to Chicago, and the firm there had written a letter to the mining company, recommending him as a young man of their acquaintance, of exceptional ability, reliable, and thoroughly to be trusted in all confidential matters. The company had responded favorably, offering the position to Mr. Houston for one month on trial, at one hundred dollars, his traveling expenses to be paid by them. If he proved satisfactory, they would retain him as long as would be mutually agreeable, and if his services proved as valuable as expected, would increase his salary. Mr. Houston was, therefore, on his way to the mines to ac-

cept this position, together with the munificent salary, and hoped to prove so satisfactory as to soon be admitted to the "confidential" clerkship, in which event he anticipated being able to accomplish a nice little piece of detective work.

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### CHAPTER III.

Mr. Houston was aroused from his pleasant reverie by the rather noisy entrance of a young man, who, with flushed face, and manner more indicative of self-assertion than self-possession, passed down the car and took a seat facing himself. This was none other than our friend, Rutherford, who, having secured his berth in the sleeper, and arranged his belongings to his entire satisfaction, immediately repaired to the smoking car to soothe his perturbed and agitated spirits by a cigar.

From under his heavily drooping eyelids, Houston regarded his vis-a-vis with concealed amusement, for he was an apt student of human nature, and possessed an unusual degree of insight into the characteristics of those with whom he was thrown in contact.

Rutherford, on his part, was watching Houston with his usual degree of interest and curiosity. Each was measuring the other from his own standpoint: Houston's prompt decision was,—“A good-hearted fellow, but something of a cad;” while Rutherford's vague surmises, summed up verbally, would have been,—“Nice looking sort of fellow, a gentleman; guess he's got the stuff, too; 'twon't do any harm to make his acquaintance.”

An opportunity for this soon presented itself, for as the conductor passed leisurely through the car, examining tickets, Rutherford discovered that their destinations were the same, and hastily drawing his card case from his pocket, said:

“As we seem likely to be fellow travelers for a while, I should be pleased to make your acquaintance; allow me,” at the same time offering his card.

Houston took the card, greeting him courteously, and

giving his own in exchange. He half smiled as he looked at the diminutive slip of cardboard with its Boston address made unnecessarily prominent, while Rutherford, after scanning the card he held, bearing simply the name of W. E. Houston, remarked with a decidedly upward inflection,

"You are from—?"

"From Chicago," Houston replied promptly.

"Ah," Rutherford responded, "then I suppose you are quite familiar with this part of the country."

"Well, not exactly," replied Houston, smiling, "Chicago, I'll admit, seems inclined to embrace a small part of the state of Illinois within her city limits, but I never heard of her attempting to claim the prairies of the Missouri valley among her suburbs."

"Well, no," said Rutherford, laughing, "not quite so bad as that, I guess, but perhaps I didn't convey my meaning very clearly; my idea was, that living in one of the western cities, you know, perhaps you were out this way often."

"On the contrary, this is my first trip out here."

"Indeed! A pleasure trip, I presume?"

"No, I am out on business," replied Houston, not caring to state very definitely just then the nature of his business.

"Well," said Rutherford, settling himself into an attitude more comfortable than graceful, "I came out on a pleasure trip, but I must say that so far, the pleasure has been rather an uncertain quantity; for the last forty-eight hours, I haven't seen much besides dust, Indians and desperadoes."

"Forty-eight hours!" exclaimed his companion, "you surely have not been on this train that length of time."

"Not on this train; I stopped off last night to see an old friend of mine that has a ranch out here," and forthwith, Rutherford launched into a recital of his experiences of the last few hours, not omitting a description of the man whose appearance had struck such terror to his heart and expedited his departure from Valley City.

"I tell you, he was a man I wouldn't like to meet in

the dark; he was armed to the teeth, and there was a look in his eye that was awfully unpleasant."

Mr. Houston judged from his companion's manner that he had not been particularly pleased at meeting this alleged desperado in broad daylight, but he courteously refrained from any such insinuation, and as supper was just then announced, the young men adjourned to the dining car, and the experiences of Mr. Rutherford were, for the time, forgotten.

Nothing special occurred that evening, except that the monotony of the journey was slightly relieved by the train entering upon the Bad Lands. For some time, Houston and Rutherford stood upon the rear platform, enjoying their cigars, and watching the strange phenomena of that weird region; on all sides, vast tracts of ashen gray or black, as if burnt to a crisp, with no sign of life, animal or vegetable, the lurid lights flashing and playing in the distance, until it seemed as though they might be gliding through the borderland of Dante's Inferno.

Their cigars finished, they separated for the night, to be agreeably surprised by the delightful change that met their eyes the following morning. Houston was already at the breakfast table enjoying the scenery, when Rutherford sauntered into the dining car. They exchanged greetings, and the latter dropped into a seat facing his companion, exclaiming as he did so,

"Well, say now, this looks a little more like civilization, doesn't it?" and having ordered his breakfast and helped himself to fruit, he proceeded to watch the beautiful panorama flashing past in the sunlight.

They were passing through one of the most fertile valleys of the northwest. Away to the south, a beautiful river glistened like a broad ribbon of silver, and leading from it was a gleaming net-work of irrigating canals and ditches, carrying the life-giving waters over thousands of broad acres; some already green with grass and alfalfa, while others were dotted with scores of men and horses opening the brown earth in long, straight lines of furrows, or scattering broadcast the golden grain.

Far in the distance, faintly outlined against the blue

sky, was a fleecy, cloud-like mass, grayish blue at the base, with points here and there of dazzling whiteness, which Houston had known at once as the first glimpse of the Rocky Mountains, but which Rutherford failed to notice.

"Well," said the latter, withdrawing his head from the window, and preparing to attack his breakfast, "it seems to me, after nearly forty hours of nothing but prairies, it's about time to see some mountains."

"They're in sight now," responded Houston quietly.

"What!" exclaimed his companion, dropping his knife and fork in haste.

"You can see them now; I've been waiting for you to recognize them," said Houston, smiling; "look off there to the southwest," he added, as Rutherford was re-adjusting his eye-glasses, preparatory to a careful survey of the horizon.

"Well, I'll be blessed!" ejaculated the latter, "I supposed those were clouds. My! but they must be mighty far away, twenty-five miles, I expect, at the least."

"Sixty miles, at least," said Houston, glancing at them, "perhaps more."

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said a bland voice across the aisle, and the young men, turning, saw a much-bejewelled individual, with a florid, but very smiling face; "I see you have not yet become accustomed to the vast distances of this great country of ours in the northwest. Those mountains which you are discussing are about ninety miles distant."

Rutherford's eyes expressed an immense amount of incredulity, while Houston simply bowed silently. The man continued:

"The wonderful rarity of our atmosphere in these altitudes is something that has to be experienced in order to be thoroughly understood and appreciated, or even believed. You tell an eastern man of the great distances here at which you can see and hear, clearly and readily; he will immediately doubt your veracity, simply because it is without the line of his experience. Now I myself, personally, with my own, unaided vision, have been able to count the mules in a pack-train sixty-three miles dis-

tant, and have repeatedly held conversations at a distance of fifteen miles."

"Guess the conversation was pretty much all on one side, wasn't it?" asked Rutherford, adding sotto voce to Houston, "as on the present occasion."

"Ah, no, indeed not," the man replied; "I see, my young friend, that you are inclined, like all strangers, to be a little incredulous and skeptical, but if you remain in this country of ours any length of time, that will soon pass away, very soon."

"I don't think I care to remain here very long then, if it will have any such effect on my brain as that," said Rutherford.

"You are inclined to be facetious, my friend; that is all right, I appreciate a little witticism myself occasionally. By the way," he continued, evidently determined to get into conversation with Houston, "I suppose you young gentlemen are out here on business, looking for valuable investments in this wonderful country."

At the word "Business" Mr. Rutherford instantly assumed his dignity, dropping into the slightly drawling tone he always used on such occasions, and which he intended as an extinguisher on any person whom he deemed too familiar.

"Well, no," he replied, twirling an incipient mustache, "at least, not so far as I am concerned; I am just out on a sort of an extended pleasure trip, you know."

"Ah, your friend is a business man, I judge; perhaps," turning to Houston, "we can interest you in some of our rare bargains in the line of real estate, improved or unimproved, city or country; or possibly in our mines, gold or silver properties, quartz or placer, we have them all."

"You seem to have a 'corner' on this part of the northwest?" remarked Rutherford, rather sarcastically.

"Indeed, young man, we have a good many 'corners,' pretty valuable ones, too," the man replied imperturbably, still watching Houston, who replied in a courteous but indifferent tone:

"I am out here on business, but am not in a position

to make any investments at present, nor do I expect to be for some time."

"Ah, your business?" asked his interlocutor.

"I am an accountant," he replied quietly.

The man seemed satisfied. "Well, gentlemen," he said, rising from the table, "I am glad to have met you, and hope to have the pleasure of seeing you later in our city. Allow me to present my card, and if there is anything we can ever do for you in our line, please give us a call," and smilingly handing each a card, he bowed himself out of the car.

"Well, by Jove!" exclaimed Rutherford, his grammar getting a little mixed, "either that man's a fool, or he thought we were; I don't know which."

"Probably the latter," said Houston, smiling; then glancing at the card beside his plate, he read, "J. D. Wilson, President of the Northwestern Mining, Land and Investment Company, Silver City," and he was the prospective clerk of The Northwestern Mining, Land and Investment Company!

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#### CHAPTER IV.

An hour or two later, the Pacific Express was slowly winding up the long mountain grade, the engine puffing and wheezing in apoplectic fashion, and occasionally emitting short shrieks of protest. The mountains, which had gradually been assuming shape and color, were now looming up in grand proportions, their rugged outlines clearly defined against the sky. Already the mountain breezes, fragrant with the breath of tamarack, spruce and pine, stole in on adventurous wings through the car windows; lifted locks, both golden and silvered, from heated brows, kissed a fretful infant into peaceful slumber, turned the pages of novels and flapped newspapers so persistently that their readers were compelled to abandon them, and brought new energy and inspiration to the languid, listless passengers, so that they began to evince symptoms of interest in their surroundings.



In his favorite lounging attitude, Houston sat, his eyes fixed on the mountains, moment by moment growing more distinct in their rugged grandeur, a half-smile of amusement playing over his face, as he recalled the interview with the president of The Northwestern Mining, Land and Investment Company. Upon inquiry, he had learned that Mr. Wilson had boarded the train at a little way station, before daylight that morning, and the zeal displayed by that gentleman in thus seeking to ascertain something regarding the characteristics of his future clerk, by anticipating his arrival in this manner seemed to Houston decidedly amusing, and at the same time furnished him a clue concerning the character of one of the men with whom he was to be associated.

He was aroused by the entrance of Rutherford, who, having learned that the train would make stops among the canyons they were approaching, was getting his kodak and plates in readiness, preparatory to taking impressions of some of the finest views.

After a few moments, the conversation drifted to the subject of their destination, which they would reach in three or four hours.

"I suppose," said Rutherford, addressing his companion rather hesitatingly, "I suppose you will remain in Silver City for some time?"

"I am not quite certain," he replied, "my impression is, however, that I shall not be detained there more than a day or two."

"Indeed! then are you going on farther west?"

"No, I expect to go out among the mines for a while."

"Among the mines! Now I should think that would be fine; you'll have a chance to see western life in earnest. So you are interested in mines! Well, I thought something of the kind when you said you were out on business. No wonder you were so cool with old Boomerang this morning, and didn't care for any of his wonderful investments."

Houston was silent for a moment, a curious smile playing over his fine features; then watching Rutherford keenly through half-closed eyes, he said,

"On the contrary, instead of being a mine owner, as

you surmise, I am the employe of a mining company, and 'old Boomerang,' as you call him, is the president of that company."

Rutherford sat for an instant as if petrified; then managed to gasp, "Great Heavens! are you associated in business with that man?"

"Yes," said Houston, looking almost as if he enjoyed the situation, "associated as employer and employe. I am going out to fill the position of accountant for the same company of which he is president."

"Oh, I see; you are just going to take the position. Did you know all the time who he was?"

"I had no more idea than you until I saw his card; but I think he knew me, was looking around, in fact, to see what his new clerk was like."

"The old beast!" exclaimed Rutherford. His face was a study, it represented so many conflicting emotions; several times he seemed about to speak, then remained silent, looking more and more perplexed. He was sorely puzzled; Houston was the embodiment of courtesy and refinement, his every word and gesture revealed a man of wealth, education and culture,—and yet, a clerk, and for such a man! and strangest of all, he seemed to feel no chagrin in speaking of his position.

Houston's voice broke in pleasantly upon his cogitations: "I saw it would never do for you to travel about here under such erroneous impressions; imagining you were associating with a heavy capitalist, or a mining broker, when—"

"Oh, hang it all!" interrupted Rutherford, brusquely, "What difference does it make? You're a gentleman, anybody can see that. I'll own up that it did knock me out at first to find you were connected in any way with that old chap; but I know you're all right, and I had no business questioning around as I did about your affairs; I beg your pardon, and I'll explain now why I did it. I'm a stranger out here, and I've taken an awful liking to you, and when we get to Silver City, if you don't mind, I'd like to keep in with you until I get a little accustomed to the ways out here; that is, if you've no objections."

"That's all right," responded Houston cordially, "stay with me as long as you like; and now, let's go out and take a look at the mountains," and the two young men shook hands, each feeling a sort of presentiment that the friendship begun under these peculiar circumstances was one for life, and such it proved.

On reaching the rear platform they discovered that the train was following the course of a river winding through a rocky gorge that grew narrower, moment by moment. The walls grew higher and steeper at every turn, while towering above and beyond were the mountain peaks. They stood clinging to the railings, and watching the rapidly changing scene, as the train swerved and swept from one direction to another, following the winding of the river.

Suddenly the walls shot upward almost perpendicularly for hundreds of feet, shutting out the sunlight, leaving nothing visible but a narrow strip of sky; and still the great rocks came closer and closer, until little more than the width of the car was left, and it seemed that in a moment that must be crushed. The ponderous wheels were slowly revolving over a trestle bridge of steel, mortised into the rocks, while the deafening echoes reverberated between the narrowing walls, and rippled the surface of the river flowing deep and black below. Then suddenly another swift, sharp turn, and they were out in the dazzling sunshine, amidst a scene of untold beauty and grandeur.

Here, at the entrance of the canyon, the train stopped, giving the passengers an opportunity to alight and enjoy the scenery. On all sides rose masses of rock, some fashioned in wondrous beauty, others in forms weird and fantastic; some gray and rugged, some tinted with intermingling shades of color, and others sparkling in the sunlight as though studded with gems innumerable. Here and there were piles of rock, crimson and green and golden, resembling the moss-grown, ivy-covered castles of the olden time. Farther on were mountains covered with heavy forests of pine, through which the winds sighed and whispered mysteriously, while at their feet the little streams lingered lovingly long enough to

catch the whispered secrets, and bear them away, laughing and singing, on their journey toward the great sea.

The train moved slowly on to another canyon, more grand in its awful solitude than the first, surrounded on all sides by walls nearly a thousand feet in height. At one side, a broad sheet of water, shimmering in the sunlight, fell, like a bridal veil, down the precipitous rock, with a deafening roar disappearing into unseen depths below, while at the base of the canyon lay a lake of sapphire, in whose calm, untroubled depths, rocks and cascade and sky were mirrored in perfect beauty.

Slowly the train wound its way upward, until it paused again near the summit of the range, on the "divide," the boundary line between the east and the west. There were the serried ranks of the mountains, vast, solemn, grand; and in that awful solitude, under the spell of that eternal silence, a sense of the infinite hushed every tongue, and each one stood with bated breath, as if on holy ground. On every side the billowy ranges surged, like the gigantic waves of a storm-tossed ocean suddenly congealed to stone, while here and there, towered mighty peaks, like huge sentinels, their brows seamed with furrows plowed by the hand of the centuries, their heads white with the snows of countless ages.

Here two tiny streams flowed side by side, then separated; the one to start on its long journey toward the old Atlantic, the other toward the Golden Gate, to mingle its waters with those of the sunset sea.

Slowly the passengers returned to the train, stopping on their way to gather the little wild flowers growing between the loosened rocks,—frail mountain children of the sun and wind,—to be preserved as souvenirs of the "divide."

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## CHAPTER V.

Rutherford had so diligently improved the opportunities afforded by the stopping of the train, in securing views of some of the finest scenes, that when the divide was reached, he had only two plates left. These he

quickly used, and then gave himself up to silent contemplation and enjoyment of the beauty around him. Very slowly and regretfully he and Houston followed the example of the others, and turned toward the waiting train, like them, picking the delicate wild flowers and pressing them in their note books.

It was during the first of these stops, at the entrance to the canyons, that Rutherford, hastily glancing up from his work, saw, standing among the passengers, a little in the background, the man whom he had last seen at the Valley City depot. He was standing in the same alert, watchful attitude, but the soft hat was drawn downward over his face concealing his eyes, and the knife and revolver were hidden by a rough jacket. He was not then looking toward Rutherford, but was facing in another direction, where Houston was strolling among the rocks, and when, a few moments later, Houston sauntered over to observe his work, Rutherford called his attention to the man, but he was nearly hidden behind a group of men, only a little of his figure being visible. Later, when they were again seated in the car, descending the western grade, Rutherford asked his companion whether he had succeeded in getting a glimpse of the man.

"Yes," said Houston, "a glimpse and no more; once or twice I was near him, but his face was turned the other way. I passed him in taking the train, but I had only a hurried glimpse of his face; it seemed to me that it was a face of unusual intelligence for a man of that class, as I should judge him to be a miner, but I did not think he looked particularly dangerous."

"Wait till you see his eyes," said Rutherford, then inquired, "By the way, did you see the old mining chap anywhere?"

"Oh, yes," said Houston, laughing, "twice; once with a townsite map spread out before him, talking real estate to a couple of men, and again in the smoking car where he was playing poker."

"I didn't see him out looking at the mountains."

"No, probably they have no interest for him, except just so far as they contain gold mines."

They talked of the mountains, and Rutherford suddenly exclaimed, "I wish I could find some way of getting out and camping right among the mountains themselves. I don't care to stop in any little half-civilized western town for any length of time, but if I could just go right out into the heart of the mountains somewhere, and stay for a few weeks, that would be an experience worth having."

Houston smiled; "How would you like a trip out into the part of the country where I am going? As near as I can make out, it is twenty-five miles from the nearest town, just a rough mining camp, with very few people aside from the miners."

"Why," replied Rutherford, "I think that would be fine; anyhow, I'll try it if you have no objections; it will be a change anyway."

And so it was decided that Rutherford should extend his pleasure trip into the mining camp, and Houston was pleased with the arrangement, for, notwithstanding the work which he had planned, he expected to find many lonely hours and monotonous days, little dreaming of the interests that awaited him, or that he was entering upon the most eventful portion of his life.

At about one o'clock the train arrived at Silver City, a town of about fifteen thousand inhabitants. The young men, as they left the train, caught a glimpse of the indefatigable Mr. Wilson as he was boarding a street car in company with two intended victims which he had already secured. They took a carriage, and as they were whirled rapidly through the steep, narrow streets on their way to the hotel, the little city seemed to them like a thoroughly typical, western, mining town. The town was surrounded by mountains, and prospect holes and abandoned placer diggings could be seen in every direction, while interspersed among the business blocks of brick and stone, were tiny cabins, built of logs,—all relics of the earlier days when Silver City was but a large mining camp.

After lunch, Houston started forth in search of the city office of The Northwestern Mining, Land and Investment Company, which he found without difficulty.

He was surprised to discover that business there was conducted on something of a co-operative plan, as the one large room in which he found himself constituted the offices of some half-dozen mining and real estate companies, and was occupied at the time by eight or ten different men, each seated at his own desk, and separated from his neighbors by a little wooden railing. A broad aisle extended through the center of the room, and at the farther end were two or three accountants' desks, two large safes and two typewriters.

The whole arrangement seemed to Houston extremely crowded and confusing, but he afterward learned that it had its advantages; as certain deeds, contracts and leases could be so easily mislaid and lost; then too, it had an effect upon the minds of some of their patrons that was particularly desirable, as they usually left the office in a state of such bewilderment, that they were unable to tell with any degree of certainty, just which one of the many high-sounding companies it was, with which they had entered into agreement, and as the eight or ten men were each connected in some way with all of the companies, they all came in for a share of the profits, no matter who was the victim.

Houston having inquired of a white-haired, benevolent-looking individual at his right, for Mr. Wilson, was politely directed to the third desk on the left-hand side. Here he found Mr. Wilson, who greeted him effusively, and introduced him to Mr. Blaisdell, the general manager of the company. The secretary of the company was, at that moment, doing duty in another part of the room, as president of The North American Townsite & Irrigation Company, consequently Houston did not meet him until later.

As Messrs. Wilson and Blaisdell were just then engaged with a customer, they begged Mr. Houston to excuse them for a few moments, which he did very willingly, and thus was afforded an opportunity to observe the two men closely. Mr. Blaisdell had rather a long and narrow face, and what is called a "sandy" complexion; his hair, face and small goatee (he wore no mustache) were all of the same, light, indefinite color; his

eyes were small and pale blue, while his lips were thin and tightly compressed. His face, when at rest, had a sanctimonious expression which was sadly at variance with the avaricious, grasping look which it instantly assumed when animated. He said little, but Houston soon discovered that he was in reality the head man of the company, while Mr. Wilson was but the mouthpiece.

In the twenty or thirty minutes which elapsed before these gentlemen could give Mr. Houston their undivided attention, he obtained sufficient insight into their characters, and enough of an inkling of their business methods, to make him more determined than ever to unearth their schemes, and doubly anxious to succeed in the role which he had assumed.

As soon as they were at liberty, Mr. Wilson and the general manager turned very smilingly toward their new clerk, and after some questions regarding his business qualifications and experience, all of which he answered in a manner very satisfactory, they proceeded to give him detailed instructions relating to his future duties in the branch office, at the mining camp.

"Of course," remarked Mr. Wilson, "you understand that as you become accustomed to the business, greater responsibility will devolve upon you; for the present, you are to have charge of the books and our correspondence from that point; and when you have sufficiently familiarized yourself with the details of the business, we shall expect you, in Mr. Blaisdell's absence, to take charge of the office, to receive the reports of the different superintendents and foremen of the mines, and if necessary, to inspect the work at the mines yourself, occasionally, in order to see that our instructions are being carried out."

Houston thought that this included quite a range of work for an accountant, but as he was only too glad of the opportunities which would thus be afforded him for his own investigations, he raised no objections.

"I suppose, Mr. Houston," added Mr. Blaisdell, very deliberately, "it is unnecessary to say that in a position of this kind, we require the utmost secrecy on your part regarding the affairs of the company. In giving you



this very responsible position, we repose great confidence in you, and we expect you to prove yourself worthy of it."

"Oh well," chuckled Mr. Wilson, "I should say, judging by Mr. Houston's appearance on the train this morning, he understands the art of preserving a golden silence as well as any one I ever saw. It was all I could do to get a dozen words out of him."

Mr. Blaisdell smiled in a way that Houston understood he had received a full account of the meeting on the train. There being little more to be said, Houston inquired regarding accommodations at the camp, stating that a young acquaintance of his wished to remain in the mountains for a week or two.

"Is he interested in mines?" inquired Mr. Blaisdell.

"Oh, no," replied Houston, "he is the young man who informed Mr. Wilson he was out on an extended pleasure trip, and he imagines it would be great sport to be out in a genuine mining camp for a while, as far from civilization as possible."

"That's all right," responded Mr. Blaisdell, "I was only going to state that we allow no visitors through the mines except those who are personally interested, or who have intentions of becoming purchasers, but if your friend merely wants to stop among the mountains for the fun of the thing, why, he's welcome to stay all summer for aught I care. As to accommodations, I think we can fix you both very comfortably. There are two boarding houses near the mines, for the miners, of course you would not go there; but old Jim Maverick and his wife run a boarding house about a quarter of a mile from there that is very good, and is a sort of stopping place for any tourists that find their way out there. I stop there myself, and I know Maverick and his wife are glad of all the boarders they can get. I believe they already had a lady when I was there last week, a school teacher or something of that sort, who had just come, and I think you will find it very comfortable there."

Having learned that they would have to start for the camp at eight o'clock the next morning, Houston took his leave, promising to be in readiness at that time. He

next visited a number of assay offices, where he learned a good many valuable points regarding the different classes of ore in that vicinity; then having purchased two or three works on practical mining and mineralogy, which he thought might be of assistance to him, he returned to the hotel, where he entertained Rutherford until dinner with an account of their trip to be taken on the morrow and the accommodations that awaited them, with the added attraction of the society of a solitary school teacher, whom their imaginations already depicted as of uncertain age, with short hair and spectacles. Many were Rutherford's speculations concerning this individual.

"I've had the pleasure of the acquaintance of two specimens of that class," said he, "one was in the Catskill Mountains; she had a geological fad, and went out every morning with a little hammer, to hammer among the rocks all day; the other was a botanist, and returned every evening about covered with plants which she had pulled up, root and branch; I wonder which of them this one will resemble."

"We shall soon see," said Houston.

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## CHAPTER VI.

Nearly twenty-five miles from the nearest town, and not a human being visible from the point of observation occupied by Miss Gladden, as she slowly swung backward and forward in her hammock under the pines, half way up the mountain side; and the only sign of human life was a faint, blue smoke curling upward among the evergreens on one side, at the base of the mountain.

Directly at the foot of the mountain lay a small lake of azure blue, at one end of which was a narrow bridge crossing the stream which formed the outlet to the lake, and from which a footpath wound in the direction of the solitary house from which the smoke ascended. At the other extremity of the lake, where the gulch narrowed into a deep ravine, walled with irregular masses of gray

rock, a mountain stream came dashing down over the ledges, forming a series of cascades, and with a final leap plunged into the azure waters. It was a wild, solitary place, and had there been another human being visible, he doubtless would have been much astonished at the sight of a young lady, dressed in the height of fashion, lazily swinging to and fro, half way up the pine covered mountain.

But for Miss Gladden the charm of the situation lay in its solitude; she was tired of society, and, glad to free herself for a while at least from its conventionalities, was congratulating herself upon her good fortune in finding this retreat, all unconscious that others were already entering into her little world, soon to enter into her heart and life.

As she swung dreamily under the pines she was aroused by a clear, musical voice calling her name, and turning, saw the lithe, slender form of Lyle Maverick, the daughter of her host, rapidly approaching. Although Miss Gladden had been but a few days among the mountains, there already existed between her and Lyle Maverick a mutual admiration, though each was, as yet, unconscious of the admiration of the other.

Lyle secretly worshipped Miss Gladden as the most beautiful being she had ever seen, nor was it strange, for Leslie Gladden had all her life received the homage always yielded to beauty, and from hearts far less susceptible than that of this untutored child of the mountains; but Lyle, notwithstanding her surroundings and her disadvantages, was proud spirited, and did not proclaim her admiration for the beautiful stranger. Miss Gladden, on her part, admired the imperious mountain maid, as the loveliest specimen of uncultured, untrained girlhood, just blossoming into womanhood, that she had ever met. She wondered how she came to be so unlike her surroundings, and what would be the result if this wild mountain flower could be transplanted to some more favorable spot, there to receive the care and nurture bestowed on so many far less beautiful. She had within the last few days, led by a desire to know the proud, shy girl, made a companion of her; this was a new ex-

perience for Lyle, and was fast deepening her admiration for Miss Gladden into confidence and regard.

Miss Gladden watched Lyle now, as she came up the mountain path, as fleet of foot and graceful in every motion as a deer, her head thrown proudly back, her wavy hair rippling over her shoulders to her waist, and shining in the sunlight like fine spun gold.

"Oh, Miss Gladden," she exclaimed, as, having reached the group of pines, she threw herself carelessly at the foot of one of them, "the solitude and isolation which you have prized so highly are to be invaded by two new boarders of masculine gender."

A slight frown gathered on Miss Gladden's face, at the prospect of intruders thus encroaching upon the mountain retreat which she was beginning to regard as hers exclusively. Lyle, watching her, saw the frown, and continued, her eyes dancing with mischief:

"They are city gentlemen, too, from the east; from Chicago and from Boston, only think of the honor conferred upon us! They have come from the land of civilization and culture to the wild west, to see how we barbarians live; at least that is the object of one of them who is out on a pleasure trip, for that is usually the meaning of western pleasure trips."

"Lyle, are you not rather severe? They come for the sake of the scenery, or as I have, for rest."

"A few for rest perhaps, but scenery? nonsense! Look at the majority of your 'western stories,' as they are called; how much is there in them of scenery? A few lines here and there, but pages devoted to descriptions of western life with its ignorance and uncouthness."

"But stories of western life usually contain a great deal of originality and piquancy; that is why they are popular."

"Possibly," said Lyle dryly, "but I have seen very little originality in the life I have led here. It may seem original to outsiders; it is monotonous enough to those who live it, year after year. The scenery of the west is grand, I love it, and if I could see it with such eyes as yours, eyes accustomed to beauty in all its infinite kinds and degrees, and with a mind cultivated, fed on the

choicest thought than can be culled not only from our own country and in our own tongue, but from other countries and in other tongues as well, I would appreciate the beauty about me more keenly than I can now; but I despise this life in which I have been reared, a life of ignorance, coarseness, brutality and deceit. Here I have lived for the past ten years, here I am likely to live for ten, twenty years to come."

Both were silent for a few moments, while Miss Gladden watched the beautiful face, in this instance an index of an equally beautiful soul, and she marveled more than ever. At last she said gently:

"Lyle, dear, pardon me for asking such a question, but you are an anomaly; how is it, living all these years as you have, in these surroundings, that you have so good an education? You have evidently read considerable, and you converse well; you cannot be called ignorant."

"No," the girl replied sadly, "I am not quite so ignorant as a stranger would think to see me, but I have learned just enough to make me realize how little I do know, and that little I have acquired by stealth. I could read a very little when we came here from some small town, somewhere in the east, I have forgotten where, and I wanted to learn, but father forbade it; he said he wouldn't have any of his children putting on airs, that what was good enough for him would have to do for them. He has always been severe with me, I suppose he didn't want any girls, that's what mother says. Mother was always as kind to me as she dared to be, but she was afraid to help me to learn anything, and she couldn't have taught me much anyway. I studied every little bit of print I could come across, if it were nothing more than a scrap of newspaper, I was so anxious to be able to read. Then, when I was about twelve years old, a little girl who stayed here one summer with her governess, left some of her old, worn-out school books and writing books. I hid them in my room as carefully as if they had been diamonds, and pored over them every chance I could get for the next year. About that time, I got acquainted with one of the miners who had been here a long time, a strange, silent man, who was very

different from the others, and who kept by himself. He seemed to take a great liking to me, and I consider him to-day the best friend that I have in the world. He found out how I was studying and trying to learn, and he helped me, for he had had a fine education. He bought books for me, not only school books, but choice books to read, stories, poems and plays, and he has talked with me a great deal, and told me about places and people and authors, and so has saved me from being a total ignoramus."

"How kind!" exclaimed Miss Gladden, "I don't wonder that you consider him your friend. Is he here now?"

"Yes," replied Lyle, "he has been away for a few days, but he came back last night, and I went down to his cabin to see him. He brought me some beautiful books, but I keep them at his cabin most of the time, so no one at the house will get hold of them."

"Does he live alone?" asked Miss Gladden.

"No, an Irishman, who has a pretty good education, lives with him most of the time; he is quite a musician and is teaching me to play the violin. 'Mike' they call the Irishman, and my friend is 'Jack'; the other miners nicknamed him 'Lone Jack,' but nobody, I suppose, knows what their real names are."

"Why, how interesting!" exclaimed Miss Gladden. "Why haven't you ever told me before? It sounds like a story with a deep-laid plot, and a typical villain lurking somewhere."

"There are plots enough, and villains enough, but Jack is not one of them," quietly replied the girl, with a curious expression.

"Would he let me come and see him?" inquired Miss Gladden.

"He might, if I asked him, but you would find him very uncommunicative. He does not care for strangers. He was telling me last night about a comical, dudish looking fellow whom he saw on the train, and who got off at Silver City, and he said he was coming up here into the mountains in company with another young gentleman; he thought I would be likely to see them, and I think they are the new boarders."

"Why, have you seen them?" asked Miss Gladden, in surprise.

"Yes," laughed Lyle, "one of them, from my post of observation behind the kitchen door, and he did appear so ridiculous with his gold eye-glasses, looking as solemn as an owl, and glancing around with that expression of supercilious curiosity, as though he expected to find us all wild Indians, or something of the sort."

"Ah, that accounts for the little tirade against western pleasure tourists I heard when you first came up. Evidently the eye-glasses did not produce a very favorable impression on you."

"Well," retorted Lyle, "see him yourself, and see what impressions you will receive."

"Well, my dear," said Miss Gladden, "as it is nearly dinner time, I would suggest that we adjourn to the house, alleviate these pangs of hunger, take an observation of the gold eye-glasses and report our impressions later."

"Agreed," said Lyle merrily, and the two began to descend the mountain.

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## CHAPTER VII.

Houston and Rutherford were promptly at the depot, as agreed, to take the early morning train to the mines.

Mr. Blaisdell met them with a great show of cordiality, his thin lips contracted into a smile which was doubtless intended to be very agreeable, but which produced a sensation exactly the reverse.

"Well," Rutherford began, with his peculiar drawl, when he and Houston were seated together in the car, with Mr. Blaisdell safely engaged in conversation at a little distance, "I can't say that I'm any more favorably impressed with Mr. Buncombe, or whatever his name is, than I was with old Boomerang yesterday. That fellow looked like a silly, pompous, old fool, and this one like a sly, old villain. I wish he'd stop that confounded, wolfish grin of his, it makes me feel uncomfortable, he

looks as if he knew he had his prey just dead easy, and his chops were watering in anticipation. I say, old fellow, I don't think much of this Buncombe-Boomerang combination of yours, and I guess it's a good thing I'm along with you till we find out what sort of a trap we're getting into."

Houston smiled; Rutherford had expressed his own opinion a great deal nearer than he cared to admit. He had seen enough of the men with whom he was to be associated to convince him that they were villains, cowardly villains too, the very sort of men that would be most desperate and dangerous when cornered; but he was fast laying his plans, and now the only drawback seemed that he would have no assistant, and he felt the time would come when he would need one, and some one familiar with mining. An expert from the east would not do, he would be suspected; and a detective would not possess the necessary information regarding mining in general, and these mines in particular. At times, a vague idea of taking Rutherford into his confidence came into his mind, but he was not ready to do this yet, if at all.

All this flashed through Houston's mind as Rutherford made the above remark, and he answered:

"I don't apprehend any particular danger at present, but I am glad you are with me."

"The question with me is," continued Rutherford, "how I'll amuse myself during your office hours in such a region as this; I don't imagine I'll find a great many congenial companions."

"You seem to have forgotten the school teacher," Houston remarked, with a quiet smile.

"Oh, bother the school ma'am! I had forgotten her. I suppose she'll be as graceful as a scalene triangle, and about as entertaining as a mummy. They're mostly that kind, or else the gushing, adoring sort, that can't talk of anything but Browning, or Emerson, or theosophy, or something of that kind; and the most conceited lot of creatures that ever lived."

Meanwhile, the train wound in and out among the mountains, stopping for a few moments at a small town



where huge smelters were pouring forth their clouds of dense smoke, darkening the air until it seemed more like night than day; then on a few miles farther, to the little station known as the "Y," so called on account of the form of the spur tracks owned by the mining company, by which the ore was brought down from the mines above.

At the station was a store containing general mining supplies, with the post-office in one front window, a boarding and lodging house, and three or four saloons and gambling houses, these last designed to catch the wages of the miners from the surrounding camps.

Mr. Blaisdell having found one of the superintendents who had come down with a team for supplies, they were soon on their way up the gulch, and in the course of an hour were left at the office buildings, while the team went on to the mines.

Here Rutherford waited in the outer room of the little unpainted, frame building, while Mr. Blaisdell took Houston into the further room, and introduced him to Morgan, the general superintendent, and to his work, at the same time. Then, having seen Houston duly installed at his post of duty, perched on a wabby stool, before a rickety, ink-bespattered desk, beside a window gray with the dust and smoke of ages, through which a few straggling sunbeams fell, Mr. Blaisdell sailed complacently forth to escort Rutherford to Jim Maverick's boarding house, whither the baggage had already been taken by the team; then, all necessary arrangements for rooms and board having been completed, he went out to the mines, leaving Rutherford alone in the camp of the Philistines. He found no one, however, more formidable than Mrs. Maverick, an old woman bent nearly double, with white hair and hollow, deep-sunken eyes, so faded it was impossible to tell what their original color might have been, and the "help," a stout, red-cheeked, coarse-featured girl of fifteen, whom Mrs. Maverick called "Minty," but who rejoiced in the euphonious name of Araminta Bixby, and who ogled and grinned at Rutherford until he found the task of preserving his dignity more difficult than ever.

In the course of an hour he sauntered down to the office to meet Houston, and a little later the two sat in the porch of the low, wide-spreading house, partly frame and partly of logs, the roof of the porch supported by the trunks of slender trees, unhewn, from which even the bark had not been removed.

From the porch there was a view of the lake, and in the distance the gleaming cascades, while just opposite, the gulch road followed its winding course and disappeared among the mountains.

Presently there came up the winding road three men, apparently father and sons,—low-browed, heavy-eyed, brutal looking creatures,—who followed the foot path up toward the house, and glaring sullenly at the young men, shuffled around to the back door.

"Evidently mine host and his sons," remarked Houston.

"Well," replied Rutherford, "I think if I see a few more such specimens as those, I'll take the first train out. Say though, I haven't seen a sign of that school teacher, I begin to think she is a myth."

"Sh!" said Houston quickly, under his breath, "see what you think of this!"

Rutherford turned in the direction Houston was facing, and had two beings just then descended from the mythical regions, he could not have been more astonished than at sight of the pair approaching from the lake. The first was a young girl, apparently about sixteen, but tall and well developed, the scant garments that she wore revealing the beautifully rounded outlines of her form, her carriage free and every movement full of grace. Her face was exquisitely beautiful, the features refined and perfect as though chiseled in marble; her eyes shone with a star-like brilliancy, and her hair fell about her shoulders like a mass of burnished gold.

Beside her was a woman several years her senior, equally beautiful, but an altogether different type of beauty; more mature, more perfect and more rare. Tall and splendidly developed, she moved with a queenly grace. Her face was classical in its contours, the profile resembling that of some of the old Grecians, while its

beauty was so refined, so subtle, it could not be easily described. Perhaps the eyes were its chief attraction; large and dark, and of Madonna-like depth and tenderness; soulful eyes that reflected every emotion of the pure, womanly nature, as the calm lake mirrors the sunlit sky or the lowering storm-cloud, the silvery moon or the lightning's flash. The wavy, auburn hair, tinged in the sunlight with red gold, was gathered into a knot near the top of a shapely, well-poised head, while stray curls clustered rebelliously about the broad, fair brow, forming a shining aureole.

Like a vision, the pair passed silently into the house, leaving Rutherford, for once in his life, speechless, and Houston watching him, apparently enjoying the situation.

"What's the matter, my boy?" he asked, in a low, laughing tone, "Are you spell-bound?"

"Spell-bound? well, slightly!" responded Rutherford. "Great Heavens, Houston! do they have such women as those out here?"

"Evidently they have some fine samples of the genuine article, but I am not prepared to state how large a stock they carry. I'm positive of one thing though, that within the last three minutes you have changed your mind about taking the next train out. Not all the desperadoes and villains you've met from Valley City out, could drive you away from the mountains now."

"You're right, they couldn't," said Rutherford, with a broad grin, "not if I know myself; no, sir, when I'm in the line of duty nothing can scare me out of it worth a cent, and just now I feel it to be my duty to solve some of the mysteries thickening around me, among them, that of the mountain nymphs."

"Altogether too substantial for mountain nymphs, my boy," said Houston, "and you will please remember, while pursuing your line of duty, that I have vouched for your good behavior here, and am in a measure responsible for you, and I don't want to get into any trouble on your account."

Rutherford cleared his throat, and rising slowly with all the dignity he could muster, looked gravely over his

glasses at Houston in exact imitation of Mr. Blaisdell, and in an oracular tone remarked:

"And you will please remember, my young friend, that I am out here as your duly constituted guardian, and as such, it is my duty to form the acquaintance of these—ahem!—these fair daughters of Eve, and judge for myself whether or not they will be suitable companions for an unsophisticated youth, like yourself."

"Good!" said Houston, and after a few more jokes, dinner being announced by the moon-faced Minty, they went in to partake of their first meal in what Rutherford styled the "Hotel de Maverick."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

A few moments later, Houston and his friend had been duly presented by Mrs. Maverick, to Miss Gladden and to "our daughter, Lyle," the former in a gown of soft, clinging material, of a delicate, golden tint, combined with a reddish brown velvet, which suited her style of beauty to perfection; and Lyle, in dainty white apron, her beautiful hair loosely plaited in an enormous braid, prepared to act in the capacity of waiter.

Never were guests served so deftly, or with such grace and dignity; she seemed absolutely free from all coquettish airs, and although the glances of the two gentlemen were about evenly divided between the beauty at their side and the fair waitress, Lyle carried herself with an equanimity that was remarkable. Not until the arrival, later, of the other boarders, Morgan, the general superintendent, and Haight, the mining expert,—so called, though his expertness embraced much beside mining,—was there any change in her demeanor; then her eyes flashed, her lips curled, and a look of superb scorn passed over her face, an expression that reminded Rutherford unaccountably of the face he had seen at Valley City.

Old Jim Maverick and his sons were not present, having taken their meal hastily in the kitchen. Beside her

husband and sons, poor, old Mrs. Maverick was positively refined. She was a kind-hearted, motherly woman, and looked as though, in her younger days, she might have been very pretty, but poverty, hard work and abuse had very nearly obliterated all traces of youthful bloom, and her face had a hopeless, appealing look which was pathetic.

A little later, Mr. Blaisdell arrived, rubbing his hands and smiling in his usual complacent manner, and he entertained the guests for some time with anecdotes of western life, some of them very well told, but in most of which it was noticeable that he bore a very prominent part.

After dinner, Houston returned to the office in company with Morgan and the expert, two new characters which he was studying attentively. The former was a tall, raw-boned individual, with a genial, good-natured manner, but a weak face; one who would willingly be a tool for any villain, but an unreliable tool. He would betray his best friend, and knowing nothing of honor himself, he did not believe in its existence, among men or women. To him, all men were rogues, all business simply gambling on a large scale, and his only care was to be on the winning side.

Haight was a small, dark man, with soft, insinuating manner, and, in accordance with his pet theory that every person, high or low, rich or poor, might sometime be useful to him in the furtherance of his own objects, he treated every one with punctilious politeness. To some his manner might have been pleasing, but to one with any degree of penetration, the crafty, scheming nature under the thin veneer was very apparent.

Meanwhile, Rutherford had rather reluctantly accepted an invitation from Mr. Blaisdell to go through the mills and visit one or two of the less important mines. The young easterner was soon much interested, as, after having explored one of the smaller mines, the Peep o'Day,—which he thought very appropriately named as he glanced upward from a depth of a few hundred feet,—he was taken to the mills, and there saw the various stages through which the ores pass in the pro-

cess of reduction. He almost forgot his dislike of Mr. Blaisdell as he listened to his explanation of the different classes of ore, and the various kinds of treatment which they required, and met some of his old college acquaintances,—the sulphates, nitrates, carbonates, and other members of that numerous family,—in new and startling array; for Mr. Blaisdell was thoroughly at home in chemistry and mineralogy, and enjoyed nothing so much as airing the knowledge he possessed in that one direction. Of other branches of science, and even on subjects of general information, he was profoundly ignorant, although blissfully unconscious of the fact.

Rutherford was next shown the method by which the ore ready for shipment was conveyed down the mountain to the cars on the spur tracks, hundreds of feet below, by means of a rail tramway on trestle work, some three thousand feet in length, having a grade of nine feet per each hundred feet, over which cars of ore were passing, operated by gravity, the weight and velocity of the descending, loaded car, carrying the empty car upward. He thoroughly enjoyed these novel scenes, and congratulated himself upon the many picturesque mining views which he would add to his collection.

As they were passing through one of the sorting rooms, they came upon Mr. Haight seated before a large table covered with specimens of ore, which he was examining with a powerful microscope, while beside him were various chemical and mechanical appliances for testing the different ores. Rutherford was enthusiastic in his admiration of the specimens, particularly those from the copper mines, with their beautiful coloring,—the blending tints of green and purple and blue,—and he created considerable amusement by his ecstasies over a large sample of iron pyrites, which he had mistaken for a splendid specimen of gold ore. Altogether it was a novel and pleasant experience for him, and when he joined Houston later, he felt himself considerably wiser in western lore.

After supper, Mr. Blaisdell and Haight returned to the office for a private conference regarding some new ores which the latter had been testing. Morgan strolled

down the gulch in the direction of the Y, drawn by the attractions of the gambling house and dance hall, leaving the two strangers to seek their own amusement, or to be entertained by Miss Gladden; they chose the latter, and, since among the mountains as on the ocean, friendships are quickly formed, the three were soon chatting as pleasantly, out in the low, rustic porch, as though their acquaintance dated back a number of days, instead of only a few hours. At the kitchen door, old Jim Maverick and his sons, with a dozen or so miners, lounged about, smoking their pipes, and enlivened by the blushing, giggling Miss Bixby.

With the latter crowd Lyle would never mingle, much to the indignation of Maverick himself, and the chagrin of two or three would-be admirers, and not feeling at liberty to join, unasked, the group in the porch, she withdrew to her little room upstairs, and taking from its hiding place one of the new books her friend had brought her, she was for a while unconscious of everything else. Then, as the twilight deepened, she closed the book, and having again concealed it, sat watching the stars just beginning to appear, one by one, and musing, as she often did, on her own life. Why had she not, with her passionate love of the beautiful and her thirst for knowledge, been given the birth and training, the social advantages of any one of that little group below? Or, if the fates had decreed that she must be born in such ignorance and degradation, and spend her life in such surroundings, why had they not given her a nature corresponding to her environment, as indifferent and unaspiring as that of the phlegmatic Miss Bixby? Why must she always feel as if she had been born to a better life than this, when in all probability, it must always go on in the same old routine which she hated and despised? She wondered what Jack meant by the questions he had asked her so often lately, as to where they had lived before coming to the mountains, and regarding her earliest recollections. Well, what were her earliest recollections? Something so shadowy she could not determine whether it were remembrance or imagination; but it was a vague idea of light and music and beauty;

and why was it that when she heard or read of that bright life, so foreign to her, of which she had never had one glimpse, that it all seemed somehow half familiar? She did not believe she would be very awkward or out of place, if she could step for the first time into some of those bright scenes as she imagined them; why did it all seem so homelike to her?

Meanwhile, the little group below were discussing the same problem that Lyle herself was trying to solve.

"I cannot understand," Rutherford was saying, "how such a style of beauty, so delicate and refined you know, could ever exist in such surroundings."

"She is a mystery," added Houston, "and unless I am greatly mistaken, she has a nature as sensitive and refined as her face."

"You are right, Mr. Houston," replied Miss Gladden, "she possesses a refinement of nature that is wonderful; and not only that, she has a brilliant intellect if she could only have advantages, and notwithstanding all the difficulties and obstacles with which she has had to contend, she has already acquired a fair education, is remarkably well informed and a good conversationalist."

A few moments later, Lyle was aroused from her reverie by a familiar voice calling her, and coming down stairs, found Miss Gladden awaiting her.

"You runaway!" she exclaimed, "why have you been hiding when you should have been helping me entertain the new guests?"

"I didn't think you needed any help," replied Lyle, brightly.

"You never made a worse mistake in your life," said Miss Gladden, leading the way out on the porch. "I have been trying to tell these gentlemen something about this country around here, and I have only succeeded in betraying my own ignorance."

Both gentlemen greeted Lyle pleasantly, and Houston rose and gave her his chair with a grave, gentle courtesy which was new to her, and which she was quick to observe and appreciate. For some time they chatted of the surrounding country, Lyle telling them



where the finest scenery, the best hunting and fishing and the pleasantest picnic grounds were to be found.

"About a quarter of a mile from here," she said, "in Strawberry gulch is a small canyon that has been fitted up for tourists and excursionists, and every summer numerous camping parties come out from Silver City for a few days or weeks. There is a fine lake at the head of the canyon, a boat house, and a good supply of boats, tents, and almost everything needed for camp life."

"Have there been any camping parties yet?" asked Houston.

"Not yet," replied Lyle. "It is too early; they usually begin coming in July; we are likely to have snow-storms out here in the mountains yet."

"Snow-storms!" they all exclaimed; "What!" said Miss Gladden, "after such warm weather as this?"

"Oh, yes," said Lyle, "this is only the early warm weather we always have in May, but it will be much colder again before summer really begins in earnest; though the weather is never so severe here as in the gulches farther up the mountains."

"It seems to me," said Rutherford, "I've heard of the greatest number of 'gulches' out here, and some of them have the most remarkable names; very original, certainly."

"Their names are mostly indicative of their early history," Lyle answered; "there are a number of them in this vicinity,—Last Chance gulch, Poor Man's gulch, Lucky gulch, Bloody gulch, and so on."

"Has this gulch where we are, any such euphonious title?" inquired Miss Gladden.

"This one has two names, equally euphonious and equally historical; it is now called Spotted Horse gulch, but years since it was known as Dead Man's gulch."

"That sounds cheerful!" commented Miss Gladden.

"Is there a ghost story connected with the gulch, Miss Maverick?" inquired Houston.

"Yes," said Lyle, "several of them, for the miners are mostly very superstitious. Years ago, when there were no well developed mines here, only a few prospects, a

man who had just sold one of the properties, was murdered for his money, about half way between here and the mines, where the road is so narrow and passes under the overhanging rocks. He rode a spotted horse, and from the indications when he was found a few days after, he must have made a desperate fight, for both he and the horse were shot several times. Ever since, it has been said that the spotted horse goes up and down the gulch at night, sometimes alone, and sometimes with his rider, and so the gulch received its name."

"Is that story still believed here?" asked Houston.

"More or less," replied Lyle. "There is just enough faith in it, that, excepting Jack," and she nodded slightly to Miss Gladden, "there is not a miner in camp who could be hired to pass through that part of the gulch at midnight, for fear of seeing the phantom horse and his rider."

"Possibly," said Miss Gladden, "it would be well for us to adjourn for the night, or we may have a glimpse of the phantoms; it must be after ten o'clock."

"After ten, impossible!" exclaimed Rutherford, springing to his feet; "I beg your pardon, ladies, for having detained you so long; I never dreamed it was so late."

"The long twilight here deceives one, I have hardly become accustomed to it myself," said Miss Gladden.

"The ladies will surely pardon us," said Houston, "since it is through their making the time pass so pleasantly that we have trespassed."

They separated for the night, and a little later, Mr. Blaisdell and Haight came up from the office, but Morgan did not return until daylight was beginning to tinge the eastern sky.

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## CHAPTER IX.

A number of days passed uneventfully. Houston was occupied in getting familiarized with the work at the office, having first created an epoch in the history of

that institution by having the windows thoroughly cleaned.

One of the noted characters of the mining camp was a small boy who, when he could scarcely walk, had, on account of his fearless spirit and indomitable pluck, been dubbed with the name of "Bull-dog." The name was so appropriate, and the little fellow himself so proud of it, that as he grew older it was forgotten if he ever had any other; if he had, no one knew what it was. He was now nearly twelve years of age, as small as most boys of eight or nine, but he possessed the same spirit as of old. Bull-dog was the oldest of five children; his parents lived at the Y, a worthless, disreputable pair; he spent very little time under the parental roof, and filial respect was entirely left out of his composition, and no wonder! He was a favorite among the miners, spending much of his time in the camp, and the shrewd little fellow was very observant of what went on around him, and very keen and worldly-wise in his judgment of human nature as he found it.

He speedily made the acquaintance of Houston, and when the latter came down to the office on his second morning, he found the boy awaiting him, and an idea occurred to him.

"Say, Bull-dog, can you wash windows?" he asked.

"Bet yer life," was the laconic reply, accompanied by a grin.

"What will you charge me for washing these four?"

The small individual surveyed the windows critically, then answered:

"Six bits."

"Go ahead," said Houston, "let's see how good a job you can do."

Two hours afterward the windows were shining, and Houston paid the little fellow an equally shining dollar, instead of the six bits, thus making of Bull-dog a friend for life, and one whose friendship afterward proved of great value.

Nearly every afternoon found Lyle at Jack's cabin, diligently reading or studying, guarded by Rex, the faithful collie, who would let no one but Lyle enter the cabin

while Jack and Mike were at their work. Two or three evenings of each week she spent there, reviewing her lessons with Jack, or listening, either to the stories which he and Mike told of other countries, or to the music of Mike's violin, fierce and wild, or sweet and pathetic, according to the mood of the musician. The cabin, built of logs and plaster, and consisting of two rooms and a small attic, resembled miners' cabins in general, with the exception of the second and inner room. Here, the floor was nearly covered with skins of animals, while on the walls were shelves and brackets, hand-carved in delicate designs, and filled with books and choice pictures, beautiful etchings and photographs of various works of art. A few larger pictures hung on the walls, framed in some of the same skillfully carved work. The pine table, covered with a brightly colored spread, was strewn with finely bound volumes, and scattered about the room were several comfortable folding chairs, which Jack had bought in some of his trips to Silver City. A rude fireplace had been built in one side of the room, over which were arranged artistically two or three rifles, and the heads and horns of various animals, while on the mantel was a fine collection of ores. Altogether, it was a pleasant room, and gave more evidence of good taste, education and refinement than could have been found for more than a score of miles in that region. This was Jack's sanctum, and none but his two friends, Lyle and Mike, were ever allowed within it.

In this room, a few evenings after the arrival of the two strangers, Lyle was sitting with her friends. The weather was already much cooler, and a bright fire was burning, before which Rex was comfortably stretched, while he watched the faces of his two friends, Jack and Lyle, who, having finished their usual reading, were silent for a few moments, looking into the fire and listening to Mike as he sat in his corner, his eyes closed, his head bent lovingly over his violin, while he evoked some of the wild, plaintive airs of his native country.

Jack was the first to speak, as he asked in a low tone, "You have met the young men I spoke of the other evening?"

"Yes," replied Lyle, still gazing into the fire, "they are stopping at the house."

"How long will they remain?"

"The younger one, the one you particularly admired, is to stop for a few weeks only; the other will probably remain permanently, as he is bookkeeper for the mining company."

Jack gave an almost imperceptible start, but slight as it was, Lyle noticed it, and turning quickly, saw a peculiar expression of mingled surprise, perplexity and annoyance on his usually immobile face.

"Bookkeeper for the mining company!" he exclaimed, "are you sure you are correct?"

"I can only quote for my authority the Honorable J. O. Blaisdell," she replied archly, "you surely wouldn't doubt his word under any circumstances, would you? You look surprised; did you consider Mr. Houston one of the 'lilies'?"

Jack looked at her inquiringly.

"One of the 'lilies' like Mr. Rutherford," she explained, "who 'toil not neither do they spin,' I supposed him one at first, but I think differently now; I believe he would always be a worker of some kind, whether it were necessary or not; at the same time I don't believe it is exactly necessary for him to be a bookkeeper."

"You seem to have made a study of him," remarked Jack, quietly.

"Of course," answered Lyle, "what else are my eyes and my small stock of brains for, but to study everybody and everything that comes in my way? Besides, it's rather interesting to find a person of some depth, after such shallow people as Mr. Blaisdell and Haight, and that class."

"Sometimes, Lyle," said Jack, slowly, "these deep people make a dangerous study; they are likely to become too interesting."

"Never you fear for me, Jack," said the girl, with considerable spirit, but kindly, "I know too well how the world would look upon old Jim Maverick's daughter, to carry my heart on my sleeve."

Both were silent for a moment, Jack watching her

face intently. Mike had left the room. Lyle continued, in a gentler tone,

"Mr. Houston is a perfect gentleman; he would make a safe study for me, even if I didn't realize my position. He reminds me of you, Jack, in some ways."

"Of me!" said Jack sarcastically, "your Mr. Houston would doubtless feel flattered at being compared to a weather-beaten miner."

"You were not always a miner," retorted Lyle quickly, "and you are a gentleman, and always will be."

"In your opinion, child," said Jack pleasantly; then turning the subject, he asked, "What do you think of the 'lily' as you styled him, Mr. Rutherford, I think you called his name?"

"Oh, he is a gentlemanly fellow, not so ridiculous as he looks; good-hearted, but not deep like the other,—not half so interesting to study."

"Very well," replied Jack, "go on with your 'study,' but I wish you would make a little more of a study of yourself and of your own life," and as he spoke, he carelessly took up a magazine and began turning the pages.

"I don't know why," answered Lyle slowly, at the same time going over to the table where she had caught sight of a photograph which had evidently been concealed by the magazine, "my life before you became my friend and teacher would not make an interesting study for any one.—Oh, Jack, whose picture is this? and when did you get it?"

"That?" said Jack, answering indifferently, but watching her face keenly, "Oh, that is a picture I've had a great while."

"But, Jack, I never saw it, did I?"

"No, Lyle, I haven't seen it myself for years, until tonight."

"Not for years? how strange!" said Lyle in a low tone; then looking wistfully at the picture, she said, half to herself, "She must have been some one you loved some time."

"She was very dear to me," he replied, so quietly that Lyle said nothing, but remained looking long and earnestly at the photograph. It was the picture of a young

girl, a few years older than herself, but much more matured, and wondrously beautiful. The features were almost perfect, and the eyes, even there, seemed so radiant and tender. There seemed a wealth of love and sympathy in those eyes that touched Lyle's lonely heart, and her own eyes filled with tears, while she gazed as if under a spell; then she asked in a sort of bewildered tone:

"Jack, I never saw her, did I?"

"Certainly not while you have been here," he replied, "I cannot say whom you may have seen before that."

"Before I came here," repeated Lyle dreamily, laying down the picture and preparing to go, "that is a sort of blank for the most part. It seems as though this hateful life had obliterated everything before it; the early years of my life seem buried out of sight."

"Try to resurrect them," said Jack, adding, "Keep your eyes and ears open, and let me know results. Had I not better go home with you?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Lyle, smiling brightly, "it isn't late."

"Then Rex must go," and Rex who was only waiting for the word bounded to the door to signify his readiness.

After Lyle had gone, Jack took the picture, and after looking at it sadly for a moment, replaced it in the little case in his trunk where it had lain so long, and then sat down by the fire, muttering, "Strange she did not see the resemblance! I hoped she would; there could not be two faces more alike."

All the way home, Lyle was thinking of the beautiful face, wondering where she had seen it, that it should seem so familiar, and after dismissing Rex with a caress, she sat for some time in the low porch, trying to solve the mystery.

"It is no use," she said to herself at length, "it is no face I have ever seen, unless in some of those strange dreams I used to have."

Going into the house, she found her parents had retired. Rutherford sat in his room reading, waiting for Houston, who was working late that night, Mr. Blaisdell having gone back to the city for a day or two. Miss Gladden was writing in her room, but Lyle would not

disturb her, and going quietly to her own little room, she was soon sleeping peacefully, and the beautiful face was for a time forgotten.

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## CHAPTER X.

The next morning was several degrees colder, and there were indications of a snow-storm. Within doors, the atmosphere betokened a coming storm, as old Jim Maverick was several degrees more quarrelsome and ugly-tempered than usual. He glared sullenly at Lyle, as she stepped quietly about the kitchen, preparing the early breakfast that he and the boys took before starting for their work.

Finally he growled, "What was you doin' out so late last night? Pretty time 'twas when you come in, where'd you been?"

Lyle seemed to take no notice of his questions for a moment, then replied, without a glance at him:

"I was not out late; I went out for a walk early in the evening, and came back early, but I staid out on the porch."

"Oh," he replied with a sneer, "so you was settin' out there waitin' for the new clerk to come home, wasn't you?"

"I didn't even know he was out of the house," said Lyle, indifferent to his sneers, so long as he did not mistrust where she had really spent the evening.

"Oh, no, of course not! I understand you pretty well, and don't you forgit it, always puttin' on your damned airs round here, too nice for any of your own folks; I'd like to see you made a fool of by some of the dudes you're so stuck on."

"You never will have that pleasure," replied Lyle, coolly, "I know too well the opinion that people have of you and your family, to ever be in any danger of being made a fool of."

Old Jim's face grew livid with rage, and he clenched his hand with an oath, but hearing some of the board-



ers coming in to breakfast in the next room, he only hissed, with a terrible leer:

"Never mind, even if you are my child, with that doll-face o' yours, you might rope in that rich young feller for a few thousands."

Lyle staggered under the insult as if she had received a blow, and pale and trembling, went into the next room to wait on the guests. She was relieved to see that Rutherford was not there; she felt she could not have faced him while those words of her father's were ringing in her ears. There was only Mr. Houston, who greeted her with his usual gentle courtesy, and Morgan, whom she despised.

Out in the kitchen, however, her cause was being championed by Mrs. Maverick, the fire flashing from her faded eyes, as she talked in a manner very unusual for her.

"You may abuse me as much as you like, Jim Maverick," she was saying, "I've had nothing but abuse from you for the past twenty years, and I don't never expect nothing else, but if you ever lay a hand on that girl, or speak to her like that again, you'll be sorry for it. I can make you smart for it, and you know it, and I'll do it too."

The boys, Joe and Jim, aged respectively twenty and eighteen, stared at their mother in astonishment, but their father, several shades paler, ordered them from the house; then advancing toward his wife, shaking his fist and cursing her, he exclaimed:

"You damned old fool! do you think you can try to scare me? you'll find 'tain't very healthy business for you."

"Kill me, if you want to," she replied doggedly, "but you'll find it won't make you any better off; I've fixed you for that."

"What do you mean?" he asked, now thoroughly frightened.

"Mean!" said his wife, as she saw that she at last had the brute in her power, "it means that you've got to let that girl alone, and behave yourself to me, or you'll wish you had, that's all."

Just then, Minty entered on the scene, her round eyes wide open with astonishment, and Lyle entering an instant later from the breakfast room, Maverick slunk away to his work.

Meanwhile, the other boarders were gathering in the breakfast room, Miss Gladden and Rutherford being the last to enter.

"Whew!" exclaimed the latter, rubbing his hands, "this seems a little wintry, doesn't it? Looks like a storm, too!"

"Yes," said Morgan, glancing up, "we'll probably have a snow-storm before noon."

"How do you pleasure seekers intend to spend the day?" inquired Houston, addressing Miss Gladden and Rutherford.

"I think I shall spend it beside the fire," replied Miss Gladden, shivering slightly, and sitting down for a moment beside the little box stove, where a wood fire was crackling and spluttering; "I haven't quite decided what to do, because I didn't come out here prepared for snow-storms."

"I believe," said Rutherford, "I'll take a day off and develop some of the pictures I've taken lately, and sort over my collection of views."

"That will be delightful," exclaimed Miss Gladden, smiling brightly at Lyle who had entered the room in time to hear Rutherford's remark, "We will make Mr. Rutherford entertain us with his collection, won't we Lyle?"

Lyle smiled in assent, but Miss Gladden very quickly detected traces of trouble in her face, and determined, if possible, to gain her confidence, and find the cause. Rutherford also noticed the change in her appearance, and remarked, after she had again left the room:

"Miss Maverick doesn't look like herself this morning, I wonder what is the matter."

"I think there has been a storm of some kind in the kitchen," Houston replied, "I heard pretty loud talk when I first came in."

"Yes," said Morgan, joining in the conversation, "she and the old man have some high old times, once in a

while; and one thing is curious, the girl never seems afraid of him, and that's more than can be said of many of the men around here."

"Why," asked Houston, "is he considered dangerous?"

"He is a pretty tough customer," said Morgan, "I guess there's no job too dirty for him to do, if he's only paid for it;" and then added carelessly, "that's the kind of a man Blaisdell likes to have 'round once in a while."

"What does he do?" asked Houston, "does he work in the mines?"

"He used to," replied Morgan, "but he don't do any more underground work, he—"

"Doesn't he?" interrupted Haight, with a peculiar emphasis.

"Oh, yes, in some ways, plenty of it," laughed Morgan, "but I was speaking of the mines; he's a sort of foreman now in one of 'em, and tends to the sorting of the ore occasionally; helps Haight out sometimes, when he has a particularly delicate job on hand," and Morgan winked across the table at the expert, who smiled knowingly in return.

Lyle coming into the room again, the talk regarding Maverick ceased, but when she had left, Morgan continued:

"She's a queer girl; she gives it to the old man sometimes, up and down; the boys don't dare give him any lip, but she's no more afraid of him, than—"

"Than she is of you," again interrupted Haight, with a smile that seemed to discompose Morgan considerably, for he colored and bit his lip.

Miss Gladden looked annoyed, as did Houston, and Rutherford, feeling something was amiss, unintentionally said about the worst thing he could just at that moment.

"I think Miss Maverick is an awfully nice girl."

"We all think so," said Haight, in his blandest manner, "Mr. Morgan especially."

"Oh," said Morgan, angrily, but trying to speak indifferently, "she's nice enough, as nice as girls of her class generally are."

With a look of scorn and contempt that neither Haight

nor Morgan soon forgot, Miss Gladden rose from the table and left the room, while Rutherford exclaimed indignantly:

"Whatever 'her class' is, she is deucedly your superior, you contemptible puppy!"

Lyle just then entering, there was an ominous silence for an instant; then Houston, rising from the table, remarked in a cool, even tone:

"There has been enough said for the present, but" turning toward Morgan and Haight, "I've something to say to you two, a little later."

Morgan put on his hat and started sullenly for the office, but Haight, assuming his most ingratiating smile, stepped up to Houston, and, in a low tone, began to apologize. Houston interrupted him.

"There is no need of any words here," he said coldly, "I shall call on you at the sorting rooms this morning, and shall then have something to say to you, but I wish no words from you, at all," and retiring to his room, he left Haight in a state of considerable trepidation. He hurried after Morgan, and soon overtook him.

"I say," he began, "we've got that new fellow stirred up, and I wish we hadn't; I don't want any trouble."

"Hang you, you little, sneaking coward!" answered Morgan, "if you didn't want trouble, why didn't you hold your tongue? Whatever fuss there is you've kicked up yourself, with your own smartness, so what are you whining about?"

"Oh, well, you know my principles, Morgan; I never want quarrels with anybody; you know the old saying, 'the good will of a dog is better than—'"

"Oh, shut up!" said Morgan, "you make me tired! You're a damned coward, and that's all there is about it. It's my opinion, though, in the case of this dog, that his bark is a good deal worse than his bite."

Meanwhile, Houston was preparing to go to the office.

"Say, old boy," said Rutherford, "hadn't I better go down with you? You may have some trouble, you know, and I shouldn't wonder if they would be two pretty nasty fellows to meddle with."

"Much obliged, Ned," said Houston, "but I can take

care of those two fellows, and twenty more just like them. Haight is an out and out coward, he wouldn't fight any more than he would cut his own throat. Morgan would show fight, perhaps, but I'd finish him up before he even knew where he was."

"I guess I put my foot in it, saying what I did," said Rutherford, staring through his eye-glasses in a meditative manner, "but it did make me hot, their insinuating things in that way about such a nice little girl as Lyle, and before Miss Gladden, too."

"There will be no more of it, that is certain," replied Houston decidedly, and he was gone.

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## CHAPTER XI.

A few moments later, Houston stepped briskly into the office. Morgan sat at his desk, sorting some mining reports, and looked up with a sullen, defiant glance, but Houston ignored him, and going to his own desk, began making preparations for his day's work.

Bull-dog, who, since washing the windows, had constituted himself office boy, had built the fire and was now sweeping. Houston greeted him pleasantly, but his keen eyes at once detected trouble between Houston and Morgan, and he was immediately on the alert.

After the little fellow had finished his work, and Houston supposed he had gone, he walked with a firm, decided step, over to where Morgan stood lounging and looking out of the window. Morgan turned, and angry as he was, he could not help a feeling of admiration for the splendid, athletic form standing, firm as a rock, before him. Houston's keen, dark eyes looked straight into his own, and for a moment, not a muscle of his face moved, the finely cut features might have been chiseled in stone; then he spoke, in even, measured tones, cold and cutting as steel itself:

"Mr. Morgan, I have this much to say to you, and it will be well for you to remember it; that if I ever hear another insinuation against that young lady of whom

you were speaking this morning, or an improper word of any kind in the presence of either of those ladies at the house, I will put you in such shape, that you will not be able to come to the office for a week; and more than that, there will be no office work here for you."

"What do you mean by that last threat?" asked Morgan defiantly.

"I mean just this; that I know enough about you, that if I should repeat what I know to Mr. Blaisdell, you would not remain in this office one day longer."

Morgan grew pale. "You seem to know a great deal for a man that's been here no longer than you have. I suppose Lyle Maverick has been filling you up with stuff about me."

"She has never mentioned your name to me, and you will do well not to bring her name into this conversation."

"Seems to me you're wonderfully particular about old Jim Maverick's girl," Morgan sneered, "I suppose you want her for yourself, though I should think the other one—"

Morgan never finished his sentence; a blow that he afterwards said was "worse than the kick of a mule," had closed one eye.

With an oath, he made a terrible lunge toward Houston, but he knew nothing more until about fifteen minutes later, when he found himself lying on the floor, under the long desk, on the opposite side of the room, while Houston stood a few feet away, watching him.

"You dirty contemptible cur!" said Houston, "do you think because you have no sense of honor, because you are so vile you can have no idea of what purity means, that every one is like yourself? You deserve to be kicked like a dog; come out from there and fight, why don't you?"

"I don't believe I'm very anxious to, if you'd just as soon excuse me," said Morgan, who had gradually assumed a sitting posture, and was passing his hand over his eye and jaw. Then, looking up with as much of a grin as he could muster, with his rapidly swelling face,

he said, "Give it up, Houston; you're a better man than I am; I'll let you boss this ranch."

"Do you mean," asked Houston sternly, "that from this time there will be no more insinuations against ladies, and no innuendoes in their presence?"

"Yes, I agree," said Morgan, "I'll never say anything myself, and I'll smash any other fellow that does; I think," he added, reflectively, "that you've showed me how pretty well, though I'd a little rather you'd practiced on some other fellow, Haight, for instance."

"I'll attend to Haight," said Houston, helping Morgan to his feet, and smiling grimly at the figure he made.

An hour later, Houston presented himself at the sorting rooms, where Haight met him with many smiles, offering to show him through the rooms.

"Another time will do, Mr. Haight," said Houston coldly, "I have business with yourself this morning."

"Oh, yes," said Haight, as if the thought had just occurred to him, "that unfortunate business at the table this morning; Mr. Houston, I am more than sorry for what happened, and assure you, that, so far as I am concerned, it shall never occur again."

"It will be much better for your interests that it should not," replied Houston; "I have not been in the habit of hearing such insinuations against ladies, or such language in their presence; and there is something more I have to say to you," he continued, as he saw Haight was trying to speak; "you were bookkeeper for the company, for a while, were you not?"

"Certainly," replied Haight in a tone of surprise, "I kept the books for a few months last year."

"So I have been informed since coming here, and I wish to state that the other day I had occasion to refer to some of the old books kept by you, and I very soon found evidences of a few shady transactions on your part that I think you would not care to have come to the knowledge of the company."

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Houston," said Haight, trying to preserve a calm exterior, but paling visibly; "it must have been some of Mr. Johnson's work you found."

"No, Mr. Haight," said Houston firmly, "it was your own work, in your own writing, and very bunglingly done at that; a man would not need to be an expert accountant,—and that is what I am,—to detect the fraud."

"Mr. Houston," interrupted Haight, in trembling tones, "everything here shall be as you wish, and I will help you too,—I can be of use to you,—if you will just say nothing. There were certain circumstances that I cannot now explain, that justified the transactions you allude to; and as I have told you, I regret what occurred this morning, and it shall not be repeated. But really, Mr. Houston," he continued, "I had no idea that my teasing Morgan this morning would have such an effect; you see, what I was joking about was really to Miss Maverick's credit; it seems that a few weeks ago, he was rather smitten with her and attempted to be what she thought was a little too familiar, and she gave him a black eye, and—"

"He has another one now," said Houston, rising abruptly.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Haight.

"Yes, and there will be more black eyes if there are any more insinuations of that character," and Houston returned to the office, leaving behind him a bitter enemy, but one whose enmity would be concealed by a cloak of friendship.

Meanwhile, while Houston was pursuing his chivalric course, Miss Gladden, sitting by the fire in the deserted breakfast room, was planning in what way and by what means she could best help her young friend in whom she felt such an interest. The scene at the table had given her a new insight into Lyle's surroundings; the rudeness and insult to which the beautiful girl was likely to be subjected in such a home, the possible dangers to which she might also be exposed, and she was more than ever determined to win the confidence of the reserved, proud-spirited girl.

In the midst of her reflections, Lyle entered the room, and Miss Gladden saw there were still traces of trouble in her face. Unconscious of the friends who were beginning to care for her welfare, Lyle had felt that morn-



ing as though she could endure her life there no longer. She had felt by a sort of instinct that she was in some way connected with the talk at the table, and she knew that both Morgan and Haight would not hesitate to injure her by their insinuations, in retaliation for the manner in which she had met their advances. Thirsting for human sympathy, her heart quickly responded to Miss Gladden's words, as she told Lyle of her interest in her, her sympathy for her, and her desire to help her, and in reply to one or two questions, she spoke freely of the trials she had suffered, inevitably connected with a life such as hers, and touched by the kindness of her new-found friend, Lyle continued:

"The insults and insinuations of those men, and others like them, are bad enough, but I expect nothing else from such as they, but when one receives insult from the source where one would expect protection,—that is hardest of all," and with flushed cheeks and quivering lips, Lyle related the scene with her father, and his words to her, while Miss Gladden looked inexpressibly shocked.

"I was almost desperate this morning," she said in conclusion, "I felt as though I could not live such a life any longer; I must go somewhere, anywhere, to get away from it. Mother says that nothing of that kind shall ever happen again, that father is in her power in some way, and she will not let him abuse me; but it is this whole wretched life that I despise, if I could only be freed from that!"

"I hope, dear, your life will not always be like this," said Miss Gladden, "it shall not be if it is in my power to prevent it; perhaps I may be able to brighten it in some way."

"You have already," said Lyle gratefully, "I shall be happy now, as long as you are here; after you are gone away,—” she shuddered slightly, then added, "who knows what may happen before that time?"

## CHAPTER XII.

A few hours later, a wild, mountain storm was raging outside, the wind roaring down the canyon from the icy fields above, driving the fast falling snow in every direction, with blinding fury.

Within doors, however, a happy group were seated around the fire, oblivious of the storm outside, or with just enough consciousness of its fury to add to the enjoyment of the warmth and comfort inside.

Miss Gladden was, as usual, becomingly gowned in a house dress of rich, warm color, while she had persuaded Lyle to put on a dark blue dress of her own, which, with a very little change, fitted as though originally intended for her, and also to dress her beautiful, golden hair high on her head, thus producing a change in her appearance which astonished even Miss Gladden herself.

The perfectly fitting gown revealed the outlines of her well developed and finely proportioned form; its color seemed to enhance the delicacy of her face and the brilliancy of her eyes, while the graceful coiffure showed to good advantage the beautifully shaped head, and added to her dignity. She seemed suddenly to have been transformed from shy, reserved girlhood, to graceful, royal womanhood.

As she, with Miss Gladden, entered the room where Rutherford awaited them, that young gentleman started suddenly, and turning, gazed at the regal little beauty, with her golden coronet, in undisguised admiration, much to the amusement of both ladies.

"Great Cæsar!" he exclaimed, "what metamorphosis is this? Excuse me, Miss Maverick, I really couldn't help it; I thought you were a sort of little girl, you know, and you are,—begging your pardon,—a very beautiful young lady."

Both ladies laughed merrily, and Miss Gladden se-

cretly resolved that Lyle, in the future, should always be dressed becomingly, if her influence could accomplish anything in that direction.

The afternoon passed very pleasantly in looking over the beautiful views which Rutherford had collected since he left his distant, eastern home. The pictures taken among the mountains had developed finely, and they all grew enthusiastic over them. Then there were pictures of his friends, in groups and singly, and in laughable combinations and positions; among them, some which Rutherford had taken of his friend, Tom Durston, and his family, at the ranch where he had stopped over night on his way out. There was one of Tom himself, in a futile attempt to milk a refractory cow, where he lay sprawling ingloriously upon the ground, the milk bucket pouring its foaming contents over him, the excited cow performing a war dance, while two others, more peaceably inclined, looked on in mild-eyed astonishment: chickens were flying in every direction, with outstretched necks and wings, while in the background, a company of geese were hissing their disapproval of the scene.

The girls laughed until the tears were in their eyes. "How did you ever get such a picture? and so perfect!" they asked.

"Oh, I just happened to," he answered, "I was out that morning, with my kodak all ready, looking for a subject, and I saw Tom milking, and thought it would be fun to take a picture of him to send back to the class-boys, you know; I held the kodak up and was just ready—when that old cow sent him flying quicker than lightning, and I caught the picture all right. I'm going to mail him one copy."

There was a picture of Tom's baby, taking his bath, his mouth wide open and his eyes shut, crying lustily for his mother, who had deserted him to run to Tom's assistance. Then there were pictures of Rutherford's home and friends, among them, that of a brother, older than himself, which particularly attracted Lyle's attention; she looked at it long and earnestly. He was sitting in an easy attitude, smoking a cigar, and looking at the face of a beautiful, dark-eyed girl, of about her own age,

which appeared above him, encircled by the light clouds of smoke,—just the face and no more. Rutherford stated that it was his brother and their only sister, and explained the process by which it was taken, but the picture remained in Lyle's memory for many a day.

After a while, Houston, returning a little early on account of the storm, joined them, and the four friends spent the most enjoyable evening which they had yet known together, notwithstanding the storm.

It had been an eventful day. To Lyle, and one or two of the others, it was the beginning of a new life, though they did not then realize it; the first, faint flush that heralds the coming of the sun to brighten the new day, but which is so subtle and silent, that few are aware of its presence.

Houston, on his return to the house at noon, had given, in answer to Rutherford's eager inquiries, an account of the "skirmish" as he called it. Rutherford was so proud of his friend, and of the victory he had won, that at the first opportunity, he told the story to Miss Gladden, before Houston had even returned to the office. Miss Gladden was enthusiastic in her admiration of the course he had taken, so different from many of the young men she had known in wealthy, aristocratic circles, in thus defending a poor, friendless girl, subject to insult because she had the misfortune, under such circumstances, to be beautiful; and obeying the impulses of her noble-hearted, high-spirited nature, she went to Houston, as she saw him standing alone a few minutes after dinner, and extending her hand, with a bright smile, said:

"Sir Knight, I want to thank you, in Lyle's name and my own, for the chivalric course you have taken this morning."

She could get no further; Houston, still holding her hand, interrupted her.

"Do not thank me, Miss Gladden; I have only done what it is the duty of every true man to do."

"Then," said Miss Gladden, interrupting him in turn, "true men must be exceedingly rare. I know very few,

Mr. Houston, who would champion the cause of a girl in Lyle's circumstances, in the manner you have done," and then, with much feeling, she spoke of some of Lyle's trials, and of her own determination to help her.

A beautiful woman is never so lovely as when defending the cause of some sister less fortunate than herself, and Houston thought he had never seen Miss Gladden so beautiful as at that moment, and the thought must in some way have conveyed itself to his eyes, for there was something in his glance that brought a bright color to Miss Gladden's cheek, and an added tenderness to her soulful eyes; something that remained with her all that day, and somehow made life, even in the heart of the mountains, shut out from the rest of the world, look more inviting, more alluring than it had ever done before.

With Houston, also, the memory of those eyes with their depths of tenderness, and the hand whose touch had thrilled him with its magnetism, lingered, and brightened all that stormy afternoon.

To Lyle, this day seemed the beginning of a new epoch in her solitary, isolated life. For the first time, she had found genial companionship, human sympathy and love, and chivalrous protection; for Miss Gladden had hastened to tell her of the part Mr. Houston had taken in her defense; and as the slowly maturing bud suddenly unfolds in the morning sunlight, so in the new light and warmth which she had found that day, her nature had suddenly expanded into mature, conscious womanhood.

That evening, as the little group of friends were separating for the night, Miss Gladden having already gone upstairs, Lyle, with a new dignity and grace, walked over to where Houston stood by the fire, with dreamy, thoughtful eyes.

"Mr. Houston," said she, in low, sweet tones, "Miss Gladden has told me of your kindness toward me to-day, and though she has thanked you for us both, yet I wish to thank you personally."

"Miss Maverick," he replied in his grave, gentle manner, "you are more than welcome to any kindness I can do for you, but do not thank me for what I did to-day;

that was nothing, I would have been a beast not to have done that little."

"If you could know," she said, earnestly, "how rare such kindness and protection have been in my past life, you would realize that it does not seem like 'nothing' to me."

To Houston, Lyle seemed much less mature than Miss Gladden, and though he had been quick to observe the added charm in her manner that evening, still she seemed to him little more than a child. Her words, and something in the expression of those star-like eyes, touched him deeply, and taking her hands in his, he answered tenderly:

"My dear child, I am very sorry for the loneliness of your past life, and I want you, from this time, to regard me as a brother, and if there should be any way in which I could protect you, or help you, do not hesitate to tell me freely."

For the first time in all those weary years within her recollection, Lyle went to her rest that night with a heart satisfied; for as yet, only the surface of her affections had been stirred, and the hidden depths below were still unfathomed, awaiting the influence of some mightier power.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

The snow-storm detained Mr. Blaisdell in the city rather longer than he intended, and Houston had improved the time in going over all the old books and office records which were available.

The books of the company he could examine at his leisure, on some pretext or other, in Morgan's presence, but his extra work, which had occupied his evenings, consisted in going over the old letter files, mining reports and assay statements, making copies of whatever he found that would be of value to him later. He had found evidence of fraudulent transactions in the books of the company, and of these he had made careful memoranda, but so far, the greatest amount of evidence which

he had secured, had been discovered in the old letters written by Mr. Blaisdell to other members of the company at Silver City, and received by him in return. These were copied exactly into a set of small books which he had brought for that purpose, and he had also made tracings and blue print copies of plats and maps of the most important mines, and of the plans of their underground workings.

What he now particularly desired was some turn of affairs that would necessitate his visiting the mines, and give him an opportunity to become familiar with their workings, and that, in some way, he could gain access to the books and papers of the main office at Silver City, as he would there find records of the business transacted directly with the company in New York. He had taken the precaution to bring with him copies of letters on file in the New York offices, but he now felt that much of the most important evidence was contained in the office at Silver City, and was the missing link which he would need before going much farther, and as he sat at his desk one bright morning, a few days after the storm, mentally reviewing the whole situation, he was planning how he could best secure this also.

Morgan, still carrying a few scars, sat with his legs crossed on top of his table, reading a newspaper, when the door opened, and Mr. Blaisdell entered.

"Well, boys, good-morning," was his greeting, as he glanced quickly around the office, and Morgan's feet suddenly descended to the floor. "What's the matter with your eye, Morgan?"

"Oh, nothing, been sparring a little, that's all."

"Been down to the mines this morning?"

"No, sir, not yet; I thought maybe you'd be up and want to give some directions before I went down."

"Very considerate!" remarked Mr. Blaisdell sarcastically, "you know I would come to the mines myself, anyway, and could give directions there just as well as here. Get ready to go down there with me, I'm going in a few minutes."

Going over to Houston's desk, he glanced hastily over

the books, gave some instructions, and saying that he wished to see him later, went out to join Morgan.

"Morgan, how did you get that eye?" he asked again.

"Oh, Houston and I had a little set-to the other day, and he hit me pretty hard, that's all."

"What was it about?" demanded Mr. Blaisdell.

"Nothing much," answered Morgan, carelessly, "we had some words about that girl of Maverick's; I guess he's a little stuck on her himself, and was afraid I'd be in his way, or something of the kind; I got mad and hit him, or tried to, and he gave me a knock-out."

"I was going to say that he doesn't look as though you had hit him very hard," remarked Mr. Blaisdell dryly, and then continued, "Well, I don't see the use of coming to blows over Maverick's girl, or any other for that matter, they're not so scarce as all that. Jim's girl has got a pretty face, but she isn't worth fighting about, that I can see."

There were reasons for Mr. Blaisdell's superior indifference to Lyle's attractions, as she had been compelled more than once, in a most emphatic manner, to check attempts at undue familiarity on his part, notwithstanding the fact that he was a much-married man, living with his third wife, his table surrounded with "olive plants"—fifteen in number—of all sizes and descriptions, and regarded in the bosom of his family as a model husband and father.

Late in the afternoon, Mr. Blaisdell returned to the office, looking very weary and somewhat worried. Morgan remained at the mines the rest of the day. Mr. Blaisdell went over the books with Houston, and after expressing considerable satisfaction at the work which he had accomplished, he sat down by himself, and seemed lost in thought for some time. At last he said:

"Mr. Houston, I've been thinking for some time that we need a little extra help in the office at Silver City, and yet not enough that it has seemed advisable to employ another bookkeeper. Our books there are getting behind, and a little mixed, too, I'm afraid. Mr. Lewis, our bookkeeper, is quite an old man, and he has charge of two or three sets of books for the different companies, and



it is not to be wondered at if he occasionally gets a little confused; and it occurred to me while sitting here, that perhaps you might be willing to come down, for a day or two, and straighten out the books for us."

Houston seemed for a moment to be weighing the matter very deliberately.

"Of course I could do it," he replied, "but it would involve considerable extra time and expense for me, and I would want extra compensation."

"Oh, of course," responded Mr. Blaisdell, readily, "I understand that; indeed, I was going to remark that you have already accomplished so much work, and your methods seem to be so exact and, at the same time, expeditious, that we will consider your term of probation here at an end; we agreed to raise your salary at the end of the month, if your services were satisfactory; they are eminently so, and I will take the responsibility of paying you one hundred and twenty-five dollars for this first month also. As to your fare back and forth between here and Silver City, of course we will pay that."

"Then," said Houston, smiling and inwardly congratulating himself, "I do not see but that it is settled that I go to Silver City whenever you are ready."

"Very well," said Mr. Blaisdell, "you will not need to go down there for ten days or so, as the time will make no appreciable difference in the state of affairs there, and I shall need you here during that time, as some parties are coming out from the east to look at some mining properties, and both Morgan and myself will probably have to spend most of our time at the mines."

That evening, at the boarding house, Houston sat apparently interested in a game of chess between Miss Gladden and Rutherford, but in reality, paying close attention to a conversation carried on in low tones between Mr. Blaisdell and Morgan. Only an occasional sentence was audible, but he could gather enough to satisfy himself regarding the nature of their plans.

"Clean the rubbish out of the shaft, and set a couple of men to work there for a day or two," Mr. Blaisdell was saying; a few words were lost, and then he said,

"Whenever I hear what day they are coming up, we'll put on a good force."

"They'll have their own expert with them, I suppose?" asked Morgan.

"Yes," answered Mr. Blaisdell, "but if he's like the most of those eastern experts, Haight and I can fix him very easily."

A little later the conversation ended, Mr. Blaisdell saying, as he rose to go to his room:

"It is a confoundedly poor property, but I think a few tons of ore from the Yankee Boy will sell it all right."

This remark gave Houston considerable food for reflection, as the Yankee Boy was one of the richest properties owned by the New York company. He had that day received his first letter from his uncle, in New York, sent under cover of an envelope from the Chicago firm, and written in reply to a letter from himself mailed immediately upon his arrival at the mines; and Mr. Blaisdell and Morgan having left, Houston retired to his room to make his first report of the information he had secured and seemed likely to secure, concerning the ways and means of the western mining company; leaving the chess players deep in their game, and Lyle watching them.

Lyle, though keeping up her studies afternoons, had not been down to Jack's cabin since the evening he had shown her the picture, partly on account of the storm, and partly because she feared her father might be watching her.

Jack had wondered at her absence, thinking perhaps her new friends had something to do with it; but on this night, Jack had other company, as Bull-dog had ensconced himself in Mike's chair beside the stove, and having also appropriated Mike's briar pipe,—its owner being absent,—was smoking with all the gravity and self-possession of an old-timer, and entertaining Jack with his quaint talk.

"Say," he said at last, clasping his hands about his knee, and holding the pipe between his teeth, "have ye seen that new feller up at the office. Mister Houston, they call him?"

Jack replied, very indifferently, that he had seen him once or twice.

"Well, now, he's a Joe-dandy, a regular cracker-jack; an' he's goin' ter be boss of that whole shootin' match, Morgan an' that little, black, snaky feller, an' old Blaisdell, too, if he don't look out fer hisself."

"What makes you think so?" asked Jack, much amused.

"I don't think so, I know it. He's got more sand than all the rest of 'em put together, an' he ain't afraid of nobody. 'D ye hear 'bout that fight that him 'n Morgan had?"

"No, did they fight?" inquired Jack, much surprised.

"Did they fight!" exclaimed the little Arab, removing the pipe from his mouth, and shaking his head with evident satisfaction at the remembrance of the scene, "well, I should smile! Morgan, he tried hard enough ter fight, but the other feller did him up in 'bout the sixteenth part of a second!"

"Were you there?" asked Jack, laughing.

"I was peekin' through a crack in the door; they s'posed I'd gone, but I see somethin' was up when Mister Houston first come in, an' I just makes up my mind I'll see the fun through, an' when I goes out, I bangs the door hard, and then opens it agin, careful like, and peeks in; an' Mister Houston, he had walked over ter where Morgan was, an' had lit into him 'bout somethin' or ruther he'd ben sayin', an' if he didn't lay down the law ter him, I'll eat my hat. An' then Morgan he sets out to give him some of his lip, and by Jiminy! 'fore he could spit the words out, biff! comes a stunner right in his face, and shut one eye. My, wasn't he mad though! Then he goes ter give the other feller a punch in the head, an' Houston, he ducked the purtiest ye ever see, and let out a blow at Morgan's jaw, an' gee-whizz! Morgan goes a flying across the room, and lan's under the big desk, and he never come to fer 'bout twenty min-its. My, but 'twas the slickest knock-out ye ever see, Corbett couldn't a done it slicker hisself! an' I rolled down them steps a laughin' so I 'most died. I went back after he'd come to, an' Mister Houston was a tellin'

him ter come out an' fight, but he didn't seem ter wan'ter very bad, an' I see the fun was over, so I come away."

Jack had laughed heartily over Bull-dog's description of the scene; now he asked:

"What was the fight about?"

"Well," said Bull-dog, gravely replacing his pipe in his mouth, "'s near 's I could make out, 'twas 'bout some girl."

"What girl?" inquired Jack, rather quickly.

"Well, the new feller, he didn't call no names, but I heerd Morgan say somethin' 'bout Lyle Maverick, an' so I guess 'twas her, but I knew you was always kinder sweet on her yourself, an' so I wasn't goin' ter say nothin', 'cause, 'nless you're a scrapper, you won't stand no sort of a chance with that feller."

"All right, Bull-dog," said Jack, "I'm something of a 'scrapper' myself, but I don't expect to get into any trouble;" the tone was kind, and he spoke with a half smile, but the keenly observant eyes of the boy detected a shade on Jack's face. However, all conversation was suddenly checked by the entrance of Mike, who, in a manner more forcible than ceremonious, dispossessed Bull-dog of his chair and pipe. The little waif soon took his departure, but it was some time before the cloud on Jack's brow was dispelled.

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

For the next day or two, Houston saw very little of either Mr. Blaisdell or Morgan, as they spent most of their time at the mines, but his own work was greatly increased, as copies of mining reports regarding the Sunrise mine, and duplicate sets of statements of the assay values of samples of ore taken from its various shafts, were to be made out with the greatest care. There were tracings and blue prints to be made from the original plats, by which it was to be shown that the vein of the Sunrise mine was but an extension of that of the

Morning Star, one of the famous North Star group of mines; and there were also very important and strictly confidential letters to be written, under Mr. Blaisdell's directions, to the Silver City office, more particularly to Mr. Rivers, the secretary of the company, whom Houston had not yet seen.

The Sunrise mine which was suddenly looming up into such prominence, was one of which Houston had never heard, but judging from the rich samples of ore produced, and the testimony of experts and assayers, it seemed to be one of the most valuable properties in that locality; but to Houston, situated as he was, behind the scenes, it only afforded an additional glimpse of the business methods of the company.

As he still sat at his desk, having just completed his day's work, Morgan came in and threw himself down heavily into a chair, taking his favorite attitude, with his feet crossed on the table, and his hands clasped behind his head.

"You look tired, Morgan," commented Houston.

"I am tired," he replied, "too tired to breathe if I wasn't obliged to; this has been a hard day's work, and if old Blaisdell sells that mine, as he expects to, he'll have to divy up pretty liberally."

Houston turned around facing Morgan, with a peculiar smile.

"The Sunrise mine seems to have developed wonderfully within the past few days," he remarked quietly.

Morgan laughed; "You'd think so," he replied, "if you could have seen it four days ago. There hasn't been a day's work done on it for over a year; some of it had caved in, and even the main shaft was pretty well filled up with rubbish. Now that's all cleaned out, and the few places where there is any quantity of ore in sight show up to good advantage, and we've hauled eight or ten tons of ore from the Yankee Boy down onto the dump, so it makes a pretty respectable showing. Oh, the boss is a cuckoo for any job of that kind."

"Does the mining company own the Yankee Boy?" asked Houston.

"No," answered Morgan, "that whole group of mines

is owned by a set of New Yorkers; this company out here is their agent, that's all."

"And New Yorkers are not supposed to know all the ins and outs of their western agent's mining deals," commented Houston.

"Well, I should say not! There's a good many things going on that they are not supposed to know about, and that they wouldn't be very likely to get onto, either, some of 'em, even if they were right on the ground. Some of those ducks are pretty green, and fellows like Blaisdell or Rivers can make them believe most anything. If Blaisdell was half as smart as he makes some of those eastern fellows think he is, he would have been a rich man before this."

"Why," said Houston, in surprise, "Blaisdell is quite well off, isn't he?"

Morgan's only answer was a significant shake of the head.

"What!" exclaimed Houston in astonishment.

"Really, he is not worth a dollar," answered Morgan, "every nickle's worth of property that he ever had, that he hasn't lost outright, has been put into the hands of his wife, or his sons, or somebody or other, heaven knows who, I don't, nor nobody else."

"Well, I am surprised," said Houston, "he seems shrewd and sharp in business matters, and I supposed he was a rich man. He must have made considerable money, what has become of it?"

Morgan shrugged his shoulders; "Have you seen old Rivers yet?" he inquired.

"The secretary? No, I've never met him."

"Well," continued Morgan, "you probably will, in a day or two, he'll be likely to come up with the eastern party; and when you've seen him, you've seen the biggest rascal, and at the same time the slickest duck there is on this side of the divide, and I doubt if there's any on the other side can beat him. Old Blaisdell's pretty smooth, but he ain't a circumstance to Rivers. Rivers will rob you of your last dollar, and make you think he's your best friend all the time. Oh, he's a lulu, and no mistake!"

Further conversation was prevented by the entrance of Mr. Blaisdell, with a fine lot of ore samples with their assay values attached, which he arranged on his desk, his thin lips drawn back meanwhile in his accustomed self-satisfied smile. When this was done, he turned to the young men.

"Well," he began, with a low chuckle of delight, "I've got word my party is coming all right. Haight just got a telegram from Rivers, that Winters had wired him that he and his son and the expert would be in Silver City, on to-morrow's train, so I will have to go back to the city to-night, to be in readiness to meet them. Let me see, this is Wednesday, they arrive Thursday; Morgan, set the men to work on that mine Friday morning; we will be up here in the course of the forenoon, you see that everything is in first-class order. Houston, are those statements and tracings all ready?"

"They are," replied Houston.

"Very well, put them up as quick as you can, I'll take them to the city with me, and the team will be here in half a minute; I want to catch that six o'clock train. I didn't expect to have to go to-night, but that telegram has hurried up matters. Morgan, you keep everything straight to-morrow, and be ready for us Friday morning."

"Shall I send a team down?" asked Morgan.

"No, no matter about that, I'll take Joe Hunt's team there at the Y, it will be a rather more stylish turnout than one of the mining teams. Everything is here O.K. I suppose," as Houston handed him the papers he had requested, "all right, there's my team; well, so long, boys, don't get into any more fights while I'm gone," and he was soon rattling down the canyon toward the Y, while Houston and Morgan began to make preparations for closing the office.

"Well," said Morgan, as he stood looking out of the window, and waiting for Houston to put away his books and papers for the night, "I can just imagine the little scene that will be enacted down there at the main office to-morrow, it would be as good as a play just to watch it. There will be old Wilson, with his diamonds and

palaver, expatiating on the country and the mines; and Blaisdell, with that dignified way of his, talking of nitrates and sulphides, and so many milligrammes equaling so many grains troy, and so many gramestons in so many pounds avoirdupois, and all that razzle-dazzle, and Rivers, not saying much of anything, but smiling, and calculating how many thousands he is going to put in his own pockets."

Houston laughed, and was about to reply, when Rutherford came in, as he often walked down to meet Houston and accompany him to the house.

"Come in, Ned," said Houston, "you should have been here a minute ago; Morgan has been giving some verbal portraits of the mining company. Your descriptive powers are excellent, Morgan, and you seem to know these men pretty well."

"Know them," said Morgan, swinging himself astride a chair and folding his arms upon the back, while Rutherford perched upon a large writing table, and Houston leaned against his long desk, with his arms folded, "Know them, I should think I ought to. I worked in the Silver City office as bookkeeper for a year before coming out here, and six months of that time I boarded in Blaisdell's family; and as his wife hates Rivers' wife, and couldn't say enough about her, I knew about as much of one family as the other before I came away."

"Does Mr. Blaisdell try to impress his better half with a sense of his intellectual superiority, as he does the rest of his fellow mortals?" asked Rutherford.

"If he ever did," answered Morgan, "he must have got bravely over it some time ago; she treats him with a contempt that would have cured him of that habit. I've sometimes thought that the reason he swells so much out among people is because he's so unmercifully snubbed at home."

"I see," said Rutherford, "just a natural effort to keep his self-respect in equilibrium."

"Has he many children?" inquired Houston.

"Well, no," said Morgan, "not many, only fifteen."

"Only fifteen!" said Houston, in astonishment, while



Rutherford exclaimed, "Oh, come off now, you're joking!"

"No joking about it," said Morgan seriously, "I took the old man's word for it. I tried several times to count 'em, but had to give it up, it seemed that every day I saw a new one. Some of 'em are as old as I; you see this is his third wife, and some of the children are older than she."

"I think," said Rutherford, "I'd like a wife younger than my children."

"He seems to," replied Morgan, "they're as spooney as can be, when they're not quarreling."

"Oh, deliver me!" said Rutherford, "I don't want to hear any more about them. How about that other man, Rivers? He hasn't such a surplus of children and wives, has he?"

"Well," said Morgan slowly, "I guess if his children could all be got together, there'd be more of 'em than of Blaisdell's, and he has full as many wives, only, in his case, they are all living."

"Great Scott!" said Rutherford, "is he is a Mormon?"

Morgan shook his head, and Houston said:

"Morgan, I think in your efforts to be entertaining, you are drawing slightly on your imagination, thinking that we are fresh enough to believe anything you choose to tell us."

"No, it's all true, whether you believe it or not. That man left a wife and family of children somewhere in New York State, more than ten years ago, and ran away with another woman; they have five or six children, and here, about three years ago, since I came here, he got his divorce from the first woman, and married this one. Then he spent last winter in San Francisco, and it seems now, that he circulated around there under another name,—and his name is no more Rivers, than mine is Jenks,—and passed himself off for an unmarried man, and now there's a woman there has entered suit against him, for breach of promise."

"Well," said Rutherford, descending from his elevated position, "I move that we adjourn to the boarding house

at once; if I hear any more such stuff, I'll lose my appetite."

"The mystery to me is," said Houston, when they were started on their way to the house, "how such a man is allowed to live and do business in a respectable community."

"Oh," said Morgan carelessly, "he isn't any worse than the rest of 'em, only he's a little more out and out with it; and the rest of 'em know it, and as long as they all live in glass houses, they don't any of 'em want to throw any stones."

"It cannot be quite as bad as that," said Houston.

"Well, I've found 'em all about alike, men and women too, for that matter, though I believe you shut me off from expressing my views about women."

"But you certainly would not include all women in such an assertion?" said Houston.

"I don't know why not, as far as my experience goes, they're all off the same piece."

"Why, man," said Houston indignantly, "what are you talking about? You had a mother once, you do not mean to traduce her memory?"

For a moment, Morgan was silent, then he replied in a tone that sounded very unlike his usual voice:

"Yes, I had a mother once, and that is what has made me what I am; sometime I will tell you about her."

And nothing more was said until they reached the house.

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## CHAPTER XV.

Friday morning, word was received from Mr. Blaisdell, over the private wire connecting the office at Silver City with the mines, that he and Mr. Rivers would be up on the first train with a party of four, and to have everything in readiness for them; also to make arrangements for their accommodation at the boarding house. Morgan had already placed a small force of men at work on the mine, and after carrying out Mr. Blaisdell's in-

structions, remained himself at the mine, superintending the work.

It was one of those perfect days, so frequent among the mountains; a cloudless sky, and the air so clear that one could see the most distant mountain peaks with wonderful distinctness. The weather was again warm, yet the air was cool and invigorating, and aromatic with the breath of the evergreen forests clothing the sides of the mountains and foot hills, while everywhere, the spring flowers were adding their color and beauty to the scene, their fragrance rising continuously, like an invisible cloud of incense, on every hand.

At about eleven o'clock, Houston heard the noise of the approaching team, and stepping to the window, saw a three-seated, open wagon, drawn by a pair of powerful horses. On the back seat, with Mr. Blaisdell, was an old gentleman, evidently Mr. Winters, and on the second seat, facing them, were two whom Houston judged to be Mr. Rivers and the junior Mr. Winters; but he took little notice of them, for his attention was arrested by one of the two young men sitting on the front seat, with the driver. The figure looked wonderfully familiar, but the face was almost wholly concealed by a broad-brimmed, soft hat. The team stopped, and at once the passengers prepared to alight; the hat was suddenly pushed back, revealing to the astonished Houston, the shining spectacles and laughing face of Arthur Van Dorn, his college class mate and chum.

The men were alighting, and it was evident that Mr. Blaisdell was in a most genial frame of mind, he fairly beamed on every one; but Houston, not waiting to meet him, made a hasty retreat into the back room, to decide quickly upon his course of action. Nearly a thousand plans occurred to him, but none seemed feasible. If Mr. Blaisdell were the only member of the firm present, he felt he would have little difficulty, but the presence of Mr. Rivers made it considerably harder for him.

Meanwhile, in the front room, Mr. Blaisdell was receiving his guests in the most effusive manner, reminding Houston, even in his dilemma, of a gushing school girl.

"Mr. Winters, let me assist you, you must be exceedingly weary; here, take this chair, you will find it a little more comfortable; sorry not to have more luxurious quarters in which to receive you, but this is the wild west, you know. Mr. Rivers, won't you see that Mr. Winters is comfortable, while I wait on his son. Mr. Lindlay, let me show you these specimens of ore, I think you will appreciate them as few can."

In the midst of all this effusion, Mr. Rivers suddenly appeared in the back room. He was a small man, quite bald, with small, twinkling, peering eyes, and a quick motion of his head from one side to the other that reminded Houston of a ferret. Seeing Houston, his eyes twinkled until they nearly closed, he smiled, and extending his hand, said:

"Ah, the new clerk, Mr. Houston, I suppose; very glad to meet you."

At that moment Mr. Blaisdell entered; "Well, Mr. Rivers, you have found Mr. Houston, I see; Mr. Houston, this is Mr. Rivers, the secretary of the company. I was just looking for you, Houston, I want you to come in and meet the people in the other room."

"In a moment, Mr. Blaisdell," said Houston, "but first, will you and Mr. Rivers just look over something I have found here. This looks to me as though a serious error had been made in this report regarding the Sunrise mine, and as you will probably need it to-day, had it better not be corrected?"

"Error in the report of the Sunrise!" said Mr. Blaisdell, adjusting his spectacles, "let me see; why yes, that is an error, and a bad one, too, I am glad you called our attention to it; look here, Rivers," and the two men were deeply engrossed in a study of the papers before them.

Houston improved the opportunity to reconnoiter the situation in the front room. Mr. Winters and his son were in a close consultation. The third man was busily engaged in looking at some ores, his back towards the door, while beside him stood Van Dorn, indifferently watching him. Houston gave a slight cough that attracted Van Dorn's attention; he turned, and seeing

Houston, his face brightened, and he was about to spring forward to greet him, when the latter, with a quick motion of his hand, gave him the signal of their old college days, its equivalent in the western vernacular being, "Don't give me away," at the same time putting his finger on his lips. A look of intense surprise flashed across Van Dorn's face, but he grasped the situation at once, and silently giving the return signal, he turned and walked in the opposite direction with the most non-chalant manner imaginable, and Houston knew that his secret was safe. A few moments afterward, "Mr. Houston, our private secretary," was introduced to the entire party, and a hearty grip from Van Dorn's hand, which Houston returned with interest, was the only sign of mutual recognition.

"Well friends," said Mr. Blaisdell, blandly, having looked at his watch, "it is now so near noon, that when we have allowed Mr. Winters ample time for rest, we had better proceed to the house and have our dinner, before going to the mines."

"If you dine at noon," replied Mr. Winters, in a very genial, yet dignified manner, "there is scarcely time for a very extended exploration, but don't discommode yourselves in the least, gentlemen, on account of my age and feebleness. I have always enjoyed perfect health, and notwithstanding my gray hairs, I don't believe I am much older than my friend, here, Mr. Blaisdell."

"Not older than I am, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Blaisdell, who prided himself upon his youthful appearance, "why, how old do you take me to be?"

"Much older than you look," replied Mr. Winters, "I am sixty-five, and you are at least sixty, although you look ten years younger than that."

"You have certainly proven yourself a Yankee by your guessing," said Mr. Blaisdell, slightly disconcerted, while the others joined in a general laugh at his expense, "I wouldn't have thought you would have made so good a guess as that, neither did I think you were so near my own age."

"You have the advantage of me now," returned Mr. Winters, pleasantly, "but if we live twenty years, as I

expect to, I'll then look younger than you, for I have the better health of the two."

"Have you ever visited the west before, Mr. Winters?" inquired Mr. Rivers.

"Yes, a few times," replied the old gentleman, while the mining expert, an Englishman, with large blue eyes, full face and blond mustache, smiled quietly at Van Dorn and Houston, who were seated near each other; "I've been west once or twice a year for the last ten years."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Rivers, with considerable surprise, while the younger Mr. Winters said with a laugh, "Oh, you couldn't keep father at home in New York, any more than you could one of these Indians out here; he's got to be roaming around all over the country continually. If he didn't drag me about with him everywhere, I wouldn't object."

"You have been out in this country often, I suppose," said Mr. Blaisdell, addressing the expert, who replied coolly, with a very slight accent:

"No, sir; I simply come out 'ere once in a w'ile, you know, just as an accommodation to Mr. Winters."

"You live in New York, I suppose?"

"No, sir; my 'ome is in London," he replied, with an air that seemed to indicate he did not care for any further conversation.

"Blaisdell," said Mr. Rivers, "I thought you said something some time ago, about dinner; if the ride in the mountain air has given the rest of these gentlemen such an appetite as it has me, we would like to see that dinner materialize before very long."

On the way to the boarding house, Van Dorn managed to walk with Houston, and exclaimed in a low tone:

"Good heavens, Everard, what does this mean? What are you masquerading around in this style for?"

"Don't ask me to explain now, there are too many around; after dinner we will go down by ourselves, and I'll tell you the whole story. I may want a little advice from you, as you're a mining expert yourself."

"Don't let any of these people out here know that,"

Van Dorn answered quickly; "Mr. Winters has introduced me as an inventor of some mining machinery that they use, just out here looking around for the pleasure of it; you know I did invent an amalgamator that is being used to some extent; but I'm not supposed to know anything about practical mining."

Houston laughed; "How about the Englishman?" he asked.

"He's no fool," said Van Dorn quickly, "though he is playing verdant; only comes out here to accommodate Mr. Winters, and so forth; that's all right, but he accommodates Mr. Winters pretty often. He's a fine expert and understands his business thoroughly, only I happen to be a little more familiar with the ores in this locality, as I spent a good many months out here in the mountains two years ago, experting mines; not in this camp of course, but only a few miles from here. Mr. Winters himself is sharp, and with Lindlay and myself out here, he's not going to be very badly taken in."

"Good!" said Houston, "and now there is one thing more before we get to the house. You remember Morton Rutherford?"

"Mort Rutherford, of old college days? well, I should say so; what about him?"

"His brother is stopping here, you will see him at dinner."

"What!" interrupted Van Dorn, "little Ned? What under heaven is he doing out here? Are you two fellows out here incognito making love to rustic maidens? or what are you doing?"

"No, Ned is out here in his own name, you won't need be under any restrictions with him, but what I want to say is this: Don't let him know who I am, or that you used to know me, or that I know his brother."

"Anything else I'm not to let him know?" queried Van Dorn, taking out a small note book.

"No, put up your book, or Mr. Blaisdell will think I am giving you pointers on the mine. But this is how it is; Rutherford met me on the train coming out here, introduced himself to me, took a fancy to the mountains, and decided to stay a few weeks. He thinks I am—

what you found me—the clerk for this company, and my home in Chicago. I am not ready to explain matters to him yet, so just simply appear as if you had never met me or heard of me till to-day.”

“But how is it Ned didn’t know you? Didn’t you ever see him when you visited Mort?”

“No, I was there only once, and he was away at school at the time, and then he never went to Yale, you know, he is a Harvard graduate.”

“Oh, I see; all right, I’ll be mum.”

A sharp turn in the road brought the house into view, with Rutherford seated on the porch, reading a magazine.

He glanced up with his usual assumption of dignity, as the party approached, but catching sight of Van Dorn, at the rear of the little procession, his magazine and his dignity were suddenly flung to the winds, and he bounded down from the porch like a school-boy.

“By Jove! Hello there, Van Dorn, how do you do? Great Scott! how did you ever come out here? I’m awfully glad to see you.”

“Very glad to see you, my dear boy,” said Van Dorn, heartily, “but the mystery to me is, how do you happen to be here?”

Mr. Blaisdell looked on greatly astonished and amused by Rutherford’s impetuous greeting.

“Well, Mr. Rutherford,” he remarked, “you seem to have met an old friend; ah, yes, I see, you are from Boston, and so is Mr. Van Dorn.”

Introductions followed, and the party sat down to dinner. Houston, seated between Van Dorn and Rutherford, did not lack for entertainment, but he had been at the table but a few seconds when he became aware that Miss Gladden was not there. He waited till the meal was nearly over, and then quietly inquired of Lyle whether Miss Gladden were ill.

“Oh no,” Lyle answered, in a low tone, “Miss Gladden thought best, as so many gentlemen were to be here, and on business, to let them have the table to themselves.”



After dinner, Houston started a little early for the office, and Van Dorn took his hat, saying:

"If you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'll walk down with Mr. Houston. You know I'm not so crazy on mining as you are, and I'd like to see somebody for a change, that can talk on some other subject."

"Go ahead," said Mr. Winters, "I suppose you'll want to go through the mines in our company, though, by and by."

"I probably will have to go in your company, if I go at all," Van Dorn replied carelessly, "my choice is rather limited."

"You'll be here this evening, won't you Van?" said Rutherford, who was then engaged in a sort of one-sided conversation with the Englishman.

"I suppose so," Van Dorn answered.

"All right, I'll see you later," Rutherford responded.

The confidential clerk and the young inventor strolled down the road together, and the officers of the mining company never dreamed of the results.

Half an hour later, Mr. Blaisdell and Mr. Rivers rose to return to the office, and the others followed their example, with the exception of Mr. Winters, who said:

"If you boys are in a hurry to start, all right, go ahead; I'm going to take my after-dinner smoke out here on the porch," at the same time producing a fine meerschaum.

"Now, father, don't you get left behind," said his son jokingly.

"Get left, you young rattle-brains! I'll have my smoke out and be down there at the office, before you are ready to start; your old father generally 'gets there' in as good time as you can make."

"I'll tell you what we will do, Mr. Winters," said Mr. Blaisdell, "the road to the mine branches off just below here, and we can just as well drive around here and call for you."

"All right, Mr. Blaisdell, that will be perfectly satisfactory, whatever suits you young fellows, suits me."

"Very well, then, Mr. Winters," said Mr. Blaisdell, "we 'young fellows' will be along in the course of half

an hour," and they went down the canyon, leaving the old gentleman in the low porch, deep in the enjoyment of his pipe.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

As the quondam class-mates disappeared together down the winding road, Houston gave his friend, as succinctly as possible, an explanation of his presence there in the capacity of clerk, briefly outlining his plans, and stating what he had been able so far to accomplish.

Van Dorn was intensely interested, and through his own practical knowledge and experience, was able to give Houston some valuable information, and to make some important suggestions.

Houston was quick to see that here was just the help he would need a little later; he also knew that opportunities for seeing his friend would be limited, he must act promptly.

"Arthur," he asked rather abruptly, "how soon do you go east?"

"In about two weeks."

"Any special engagements for this summer?"

"Nothing particularly important at present."

"You remember my uncle, don't you?"

"I remember Mr. Cameron perfectly, though I have not seen him for a number of years."

"I suppose, for a sufficient consideration, you would come out here on business for us, at any time?"

"Like Lindlay, 'just to accommodate,' I suppose," laughed Van Dorn, and continued, "Everard, old boy, I am at the service of yourself and your uncle, and we'll say nothing about 'considerations' until afterward; then arrange it between yourselves."

"We will not require your time and services without ample compensation," returned Houston, "but you will be just the man I will need later; an expert, familiar with this locality, in whom my uncle will repose perfect confidence, and whom the company here will not suspect."

"But Mr. Cameron may not place much confidence in the harum-scarum sophomore that visited his home a few years since, if he remembers him at all," said Van Dorn, with a little laugh.

"My word will be enough for that," said Houston, "I will write a letter this afternoon for you to take to him. There are the gentlemen now, coming down the road; I will see you again this evening, and probably to-morrow. I wonder what has become of Mr. Winters?"

"Probably he is taking his afternoon smoke," said Van Dorn. "I think the old gentleman would throw up the whole mining deal rather than sacrifice that. After what you've told me of this mining concern out here, I've considerable curiosity to see this famous mine they've been writing about. I've got an idea just about how it will pan out, but I'll say nothing till I've seen it."

"Let me know your impressions, later," said Houston.

"Agreed," answered Van Dorn, and the party outside having nearly reached the door, the subject was dropped.

Meanwhile, Mr. Winters, seated in the rustic porch, his attention divided between the picturesque scenery surrounding him, and the spirals of blue smoke which he loved to watch, was in no hurry to exchange his present enjoyment for subterranean explorations; the rest and solitude seemed doubly welcome after the last few weeks of travel.

Rutherford, who lingered a few moments after the others had gone, did not find him very socially inclined, and picking up his magazine from the floor, where it had reposed since Van Dorn's appearance, he started up the canyon for a stroll among the rocks by the lake.

It is to be feared that Mr. Winters, under the combined influence of his pipe and the warm sunshine, was very nearly asleep. It is certain that he never heard the sound of soft, trailing garments beside him, nor did he appear to be in full possession of all his faculties, until two arms rested lightly on his shoulders, and a pair of small, white hands were clasped across his eyes.

Such a proceeding, under such circumstances, natur-

ally had the effect of very quickly restoring his faculties to their normal condition, but on trying to turn his head, he found it held as firmly as in a vise, by the hands which had been quickly removed from his eyes, while a mischievous voice announced imperiously:

"Guess who it is, and you are free!"

"Guess!" exclaimed the old gentleman in some perplexity, "why, if I were at home, I would know this was one of my little girl's tricks, but I cannot imagine who it is here."

There was a musical, rippling laugh, as the hands were withdrawn, and Mr. Winters, turning quickly, came near losing his pipe in astonishment.

"Bless my soul, Leslie! what does this mean? Well, well! so it was my little girl after all, up to her old tricks; but, child, how came you out here, in such a place as this?"

At that moment, Houston or Rutherford would scarcely have recognized Miss Gladden, could they have seen her seated beside Mr. Winters with all the careless abandon of a child, laughing merrily in answer to his numerous questions, while he playfully pinched her cheek, or pulled her ear. To Mr. Winters, however, she seemed like one of his own children, for Leslie Gladden was an orphan, and Mr. and Mrs. Winters, having been deeply attached to her parents, and having no daughter of their own, had always regarded her as a daughter, and much of her life had been passed in their home.

"Well, puss," said Mr. Winters, having answered her inquiries regarding his family, "seems to me it's about time you gave an account of yourself; what are you doing here? and what have you been doing since last Easter? and where are Helen and her husband?"

"One question at a time, if you please, sir," said Miss Gladden.

"That's right, giving the old man orders, as usual; we always spoiled you, Leslie. Well, in the first place, what possessed you to leave us in the way you did? We understood you had gone to spend Easter with Helen; and the next we heard, Helen wrote her sister that they

were going to spend the summer traveling in the west, and that you were to accompany them."

"I will explain that a little later; what is the next in order?"

"Is Helen here with you?"

"No, sir, she and George are in Denver."

"And who is stopping here with you?"

"No one; do you think I need a guardian, or a chaperon?"

The old man's eyes twinkled; "You always were an independent sort of a girl, and pretty level-headed, too, I must admit; but, my dear child, is it safe for you to be out here alone among the miners, and this rough class of people?"

Miss Gladden laughed; "Did you see any very rough people to-day at dinner?"

"Why no, to be sure, I did not, but then, there must be many of them out here in this neighborhood."

"I never see them," said Miss Gladden, "I associate only with the people you met to-day; no one here knows that I have wealth; so really, I am safer here than at home, where I am known."

"But there is no society here," protested the old gentleman.

"I came here to get away from society; there is plenty of refined and pleasant companionship, and if I have friends here, I know they are sincere friends, not money worshippers, or fortune hunters."

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Winters, "the princess is out here in disguise, seeking some knight who will love her for herself alone, and not for her fortune."

"No," said Miss Gladden gravely, "I have not come out here seeking for any knight, but to escape from a base, dishonorable and cowardly knave."

"Has your cousin Humphrey been annoying you again?"

"Yes, he and his mother made life a burden to me, that was my reason for leaving home as I did. Humphrey has sunk nearly every dollar of their property by his profligacy, and now, he and his mother are determined to have my fortune. Aunt exhausted all her stock of

melodramatic and sentimental language<sup>e</sup> and her tears in trying to get me to fulfill what she called my father's 'dying wish,' by marrying that debauchee and libertine; then she tried threats, and finally became so wild with rage, that she reminded me of the will, and told me I should never marry any one else; that Humphrey should have the property, as my father intended, sooner or later, if not with me, then without me. I knew Helen intended to come west, and I went to her and asked to let me travel with them. Now, you know my reason for leaving so suddenly, and for not writing. We have all enjoyed our trip very much; you know George came out on business, and when he was occupied, of course it was pleasanter for Helen that I was with her. While we were at St. Paul, George met some mining men, and he immediately began to have symptoms of mining fever, and hearing of the mines out here, he brought us out, among the mountains and miners. We came out when the weather was warm and delightful, and Helen and I roamed over the mountains while George explored the mines. Then he decided to go to Denver, and I would probably have accompanied them, though I had become attached to this place, but just then I heard that my cousin had traced me to St. Paul, and was in pursuit, to renew his attentions to me, so I decided to remain here where he will be less likely to find me. Helen and her husband are in Denver, sworn to secrecy regarding my whereabouts."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the old gentleman, meditatively, "I wouldn't have thought your aunt would so far have forgotten herself. It was unfortunate that your father made such a will, leaving everything to Humphrey in case of your dying unmarried, but that was when you were both children, and he was very fond of the little fellow. Leslie, my dear, I wish you were married."

"But I ain not, and perhaps never likely to be," Miss Gladden answered merrily.

"Yes, and you might have been married twenty times over," said Mr. Winters, shaking his head, "and my own boy, Harry, among the lot."

"Once is enough for me, papa dear," said Miss Gladden lightly, yet in a more tender tone, "when the right one comes; but it could never have been Harry, any more than his brother, Richard; you and mamma were like parents to me, and the boys both seem like brothers."

"Have you found the right one, yet?" asked the old gentleman, watching her keenly.

"As I told you, I am not looking for a knight," she answered brightly, but the color deepened on her cheek, "if he ever comes, he must find me."

Mr. Winters noted the telltale flush, and slowly shaking his head, remarked, "I don't know, Leslie, about the advisability of leaving you here; you were always inclined to be very philanthropic, and it would be like you to adopt some young man out here, thinking you had money enough for yourself and him, too; that clerk down at the office, for instance, or this kid that was prancing around in eye-glasses."

"The 'kid' as you call him," Miss Gladden answered demurely, "has plenty of money of his own, and Mr. Houston seems abundantly able to take care of himself; if I adopt any one, it will be that beautiful girl who waited on you at dinner."

"What is that, my dear?" said the old gentleman, brightening, "I noticed that girl at the table to-day; she is remarkably fine looking, and seemed to conduct herself like a perfect lady; who is she?"

Miss Gladden, in her enthusiastic manner, began telling him of Lyle, and of the interest she had taken in her, but before she had proceeded very far, the team appeared at the junction of the roads, the men calling Mr. Winters.

"Bless my stars, if there isn't the team!" he exclaimed, "well my little girl, good-bye for the present, you will see us both this evening," and having given Miss Gladden a promise that neither he nor his son would betray her secret, he hastened down the road to the waiting team.

"Well, boys," he said, stopping to carefully empty the ashes from his pipe on a projecting ledge of rock, "I will

have to give you credit for being on hand very promptly; that was about the shortest half hour that I can remember."

A loud, ringing laugh greeted this remark, which caused Mr. Winters, who was replacing his pipe in its case, to look up in mild wonder.

"That's one on you, father," called his son, while Mr. Blaisdell remarked, "The time evidently has passed very pleasantly."

"What is the origin of all this mirth?" demanded Mr. Winters, as he seated himself with considerable dignity.

"It seems," said Mr. Rivers, in explanation, "to be because you were so unconscious of the lapse of time; we were delayed in getting together our papers, and it is over an hour since we left the house."

"I looked for you at every turn of the road," said his son.

"I didn't," said Van Dorn, "I thought he had fallen asleep over his pipe; I never dreamed he was disgracing the whole crowd of us by such open flirtation as that,—I wish we had brought along a chaperon."

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Winters very deliberately, "all I have to say is, that had you been in my place, the time would have seemed equally short to you, and I don't think there's one of you but would have been mighty glad to have been in my place."

"Mr. Winters," said Mr. Blaisdell, "I begin to think you're the youngest man of our party."

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## CHAPTER XVII.

With many jokes and much hilarity, the mining party proceeded on their way. Arriving at the mines, they found Morgan and Haight awaiting them, who were duly introduced to the party, the English expert looking at Haight with much the same expression with which a mastiff might regard a rat terrier.

Everything being in readiness, they began the descent



of the long incline shaft, Mr. Blaisdell and Haight leading the way with Mr. Lindlay, while Mr. Rivers followed with Mr. Winters and his son and Van Dorn, Morgan bringing up the rear.

It was nearly three hours before they reappeared at the surface, and to a physiognomist, their faces, as they emerged from the mouth of the shaft, would have furnished an amusing study.

Mr. Blaisdell looked irritated and annoyed, but jubilant. He had been thoroughly disgusted by the conduct of the English expert. Instead of taking Mr. Blaisdell's word regarding the mine, corroborated as it was by undisputable evidence in the shape of mining reports, surveyor's notes, and maps, he had insisted on ascertaining for himself the important data, the width, dip and course of the vein, and the measurement of various angles and distances, with a persistency and accuracy that was simply exasperating. He also picked up samples of ore in the most unexpected places which he examined with the closest scrutiny. But having taken his measurements and made his examinations, the results were immediately jotted down in his note book, and the samples dropped in his pockets, without a word, which convinced Mr. Blaisdell that the expert knew very little of his business, and was probably either doing this to keep up appearances, or to gain a little information for his own benefit. Not a word had been said contradicting the statements he had made, not a question raised implying any doubt of their correctness;—evidently they were just the kind of purchasers he wanted, and his firmly set jaws and tightly compressed lips expressed his satisfaction.

Mr. Rivers scanned the company keenly with his ferret-like glances; such unexpected acquiescence on their part made him slightly suspicious and very watchful. The thought uppermost in his mind was, "Either these people know absolutely nothing about mining, or they know too much for our good." He had intended going back to the city that evening, but he now decided to remain over.

Mr. Winters, senior, reappeared, wearing the same ex-

pression of benevolence and dignity with which he had entered the mine. He seemed serenely unconscious of the existence of deceit or fraud in business transactions generally, and in mining negotiations in particular. Only those well acquainted with him could detect from the exaggerated twinkle of his eyes, that something had more than ordinarily amused him.

Van Dorn and Lindlay had agreed before hand that they would keep entirely separate, and each pursue his own course of investigation independently of the other, —Van Dorn of course not being able to take any measurements, as he was not supposed to be an expert,— and compare notes later. As the two emerged into daylight and their eyes met, Van Dorn's laughing, blushing face would have betrayed him, had any one known his real business there, but a young inventor, exploring mines just for the fun of the thing, is supposed to find plenty of amusement. Under the big, blond mustache of the Englishman, a pair of lips curled scornfully, and his eyes rolled wildly for a moment, but that was all.

As the gentlemen gathered around the dump, the last vestige of Mr. Blaisdell's irritation seemed to have disappeared, as he blandly expatiated upon the quantity and quality of the ore.

Van Dorn's eyes sparkled as he saw the shining lumps from the Yankee Boy, and he and Lindlay exchanged quick glances.

"Look at that," said the latter, quickly extracting from his pocket a sample of the Sunrise ore and placing it beside a piece taken at random from the dump; "does any one pretend to tell me that those are from the same vein?"

"It is a different class of ore altogether," replied Van Dorn, "such ore as that never would be found under the conditions existing in that mine, but I'll be blest if I wouldn't like to see the mine it did come from."

Mr. Rivers had observed this little side conversation and Van Dorn's close scrutiny of the samples, and was at his side in a moment, inquiring in his smoothest tones:

"What do you think of that ore, Mr. Van Dorn?"

"Very fine ore, so far as I can judge," said Van Dorn

carelessly, "I would like to see it run through that concentrator and amalgamator of mine; if these men ever get through talking about mines, Mr. Rivers, I must get you and Mr. Blaisdell interested in my machinery."

At the suggestion of Mr. Lindlay, the party next paid a visit to the Morning Star mine, that being the one which Mr. Blaisdell had declared was on the same lead as the Sunrise. This they found to be a valuable mine, but there was not the slightest indication of the vein being identical with that of the Sunrise, its strike carrying it in a totally different direction, and its characteristics being wholly dissimilar.

As it was too late for any further mining explorations, the team was ordered, and preparations made for a return to the house.

Lindlay and Van Dorn, by mutual agreement, started up the canyon road together, in advance of the others.

"Boys, where are you going?" called Mr. Winters.

"Going to walk on ahead," answered Van Dorn.

"Just as cheap to ride," said Mr. Winters.

"Plenty of room," added Mr. Blaisdell.

"We can't wait for you, you're too slow," laughed Van Dorn.

"Give our places to those gentlemen," said Lindlay, indicating Haight and Morgan, and with rather a painful emphasis on the word "gentlemen."

"Egad!" he exclaimed a few moments later, "Van Dorn, what do you think of that for a mining proposition?"

"It's pretty tough, in fact, about the toughest I ever saw," replied Van Dorn, "but then, you remember we got a hint at Silver City that they were sharpers."

"Sharpers!" exclaimed Lindlay, "but I don't call them sharpers; I can admire a good, genuine piece of keen rascality, don't you know, for I can play just as sharp a game myself as the best of them, but w'en it comes to such downright, beastly work as this, so blundering and bungling you know, w'y it looks too much as though they thought we were all born idiots, to be very complimentary."

"I'll admit it looks that way," said Van Dorn, laugh-

ing, "it doesn't look as though they had a very flattering opinion of our acquirements, or our natural penetration, if they suppose we can be gulled in this way. They are about the worst set of mining sharks I've ever had the pleasure of meeting, and I shall tell Houston so."

"By the way, that Mr. 'Uston seems a very decent sort of a man," commented Lindlay.

"He's a fine fellow," responded Van Dorn warmly, "you see I know him, he's a friend of mine, but don't say anything till we get out of here."

"A friend of yours! and w'at in the deuce is he doing out 'ere, among such a beastly lot?"

"He is out on a piece of detective work on his own account," and Van Dorn briefly gave Lindlay an outline of what Houston had told him. A prolonged "Ah—h" from Lindlay was the only response.

"I thought I'd better tell you," said Van Dorn, "for fear you would include him in the lot out here, and be down on him with the rest. He is a splendid fellow, and I want you to know him."

"That I will," responded the Englishman, "'ere, give 'im my card, and tell 'im I'll be very glad to 'elp 'im out a bit any time if he needs it later, you know; I would like to see 'im get the best of these fellows."

"I will tell him," replied Van Dorn, "he may give you a letter of introduction to his uncle. They are all fine people, and, as you say, I would like to see Houston get the best of these rascals; I believe he will, too, though he will have to lay low for a while yet, and there may be some pretty dangerous work for him before he gets through."

The pedestrians and the remainder of the party reached the house at nearly the same time, the latter having been slightly delayed in starting. Although a little late, Houston and Rutherford, with Miss Gladden and Lyle, were awaiting them in the porch. The rare beauty of the two ladies elicited expressions of admiration from both Lindlay and Van Dorn, the latter exclaiming:

"They evidently have some fine specimens of ladies

out here, and no mistake; there seems to be no fraud in that direction. No wonder the old gentleman was so indifferent as to whether we called for him or not!"

Miss Gladden extended a welcome, both cordial and graceful, to Mr. Winters and his son, and also to Van Dorn, whom Rutherford introduced as an old friend. Other introductions followed, and the entire company entered the long, low dining room, whither Lyle had already preceded them to see that everything was in perfect readiness. Exclamations of surprise and pleasure were heard on all sides, as the table had been tastefully decorated by the skillful fingers of the ladies, with wild flowers, and their beauty and fragrance filled the room. A very social meal followed, interspersed with jokes and repartee, and pleasant reminiscences. Toward the close, Mr. Blaisdell entertained them with amusing sketches of western life, and soon was relating some of his first mining experiences, when he had just come from the east, a newly fledged mining expert.

"I was asked, in company with another expert, a western man, much older than I, to examine some properties for some mining men. They were all experienced miners, old hands at the business, and they regarded me, a young graduate from an eastern mining school, with no practical knowledge that they knew of, as totally incompetent to advise them, and, I think, invited me more out of courtesy than anything else; perhaps also, out of benevolent intention to give me an opportunity to learn something about mines.

"The evening previous to the day the examination was to be made, they met for a little conversation regarding the history of the mine, and to make plans for the following day. Of course, our talk was principally of mining in general. Well, didn't I play 'green' that evening. You can bet your sweet life that I did!"

Here Lindlay elbowed Houston, who in turn nudged Van Dorn. The last named gentleman telegraphed across to the younger Winters and Rutherford, and there seemed imminent danger of a general explosion; however, Mr. Blaisdell thought it was all in appreciation of his story, and blandly continued:

"I think when we broke up that night, the rest of them must have wondered among themselves why they had been such fools as to invite me. But I was only anxious for the time to come to go down into that mine. It was a property which the company had bought when it was nothing but a prospect, but which had then possessed every indication of being a wonderful producer of very rich ore, and it was supposed that with a little further development it would make a very fine property. The company had immediately proceeded to develop the mine, following the vein, as they supposed, for several hundred feet, but it did not amount to anything worth speaking of. Occasionally they would find croppings of very rich ore, but no true vein, and they had finally determined to call in one or two experts, and after an examination, decide whether it was worth the expenditure of any more money, or whether it had better be abandoned.

"Well, aside from having received a fine education in this branch of science, I had worked a good deal in some of old Nature's laboratories, and was more familiar with these things than they thought. I knew, from their talk, that they were not following the course of the vein, though they thought they were, but of course, I said nothing of that kind; I was playing green.

"The next day we went down into the mine, and I found just what I expected to find; that they were simply following a false lead, and in reality, going farther and farther from the vein every move they made. There was the original vein to start with, and they had struck a false lead close beside it, and were going down; digging down lower and lower, while the true vein was right over their heads, and those miners and that con-founded expert that knew so much more than I did, didn't any of them know enough just to look up there and see it. Why, near the point where they had first started, I could see the ore shining in places over my head, and there were croppings of it all along.

"Well, to make a long story short, I advised them to stick to the mine, and the expert advised them to abandon it. A little while afterward, I asked them what they

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would take for the mine; of course they thought that an additional proof of my greenness that I should talk of buying it, but I hung on, not appearing very anxious about it of course, for then they might suspect something. You won't believe me, but I bought that mine for five hundred dollars, cash, and they thought I was the biggest fool and tenderfoot that ever came out here. I tell you, I made sure of a good, clear title to that property, and then I went to work. I followed the old, original vein, and in less than six weeks I had gold just a pouring out of that mine. My! but didn't that company try to get back then! but I wouldn't have anything to do with them; I told them I was a greenhorn and a tenderfoot, and they had better let me alone. Well, sir, I worked that mine eighteen months, and cleared, over and above all expenses, one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and then I sold it for half a million, and those other fellows have been kicking themselves ever since."

There was a hearty laugh at the termination of the story, and the company adjourned to the porch and the open space surrounding the house, for the evening.

Taken all in all, there was in that little company sheltered under the old house that night, a strange combination of plots and counter plots, secrets and mysteries; and to Houston himself, as he sat a little apart from the others, watching the group with thoughtful eyes, it seemed a curious coincidence, that, on that evening, and at that place, there should be assembled so many of the principal actors in the drama which he knew must ere long be enacted, and he was unable to shake off a vague presentiment that this was the opening scene. Just what would that drama be, he wondered, would it be comedy or tragedy? never, with all his foresight, dreaming the depth of tragedy so soon to follow, or recognizing as such, some of the chief actors, even then passing within his ken.

On one side of the low porch was seated Miss Gladden, entertaining Mr. Winters and his son, while behind her, Lyle was standing with unconscious grace, and a far-away, dreamy look in her eyes. Just across the entrance,

on the other side, were Lindlay, Van Dorn and Rutherford, the last two engaged in animated conversation regarding old times, Lindlay occasionally joining with them, but most of the time watching Miss Gladden, with much admiration expressed in his usually critical face. Mr. Rivers sauntered back and forth before the house, smoking, while, at a little distance, Mr. Blaisdell, Haight and Morgan were talking together. Jim Maverick, coming from behind the house, touched his hat as a salute to Mr. Blaisdell, and after a quick glance of suspicious distrust at the elder Mr. Winters, shuffled off in the direction of the miners' quarters. A little later, a man with powerful, athletic frame, who walked with quick, elastic step, and yet as though conscious of his power, passed the house, followed by a fine collie. His hat was drawn low over his eyes, partly concealing his face, but this did not prevent his watching the group on the porch with close, keen scrutiny. Houston and Rutherford started slightly, and exchanged glances, for they had recognized their fellow passenger from Valley City, and they would doubtless have made some comment, but that just then Miss Gladden spoke:

"Lyle, dear, I wonder who that can be; he is dressed like a miner, but his carriage and appearance is that of a gentleman."

"That," answered Lyle, in a low tone, "is Jack; he is a miner, and he is also a gentleman."

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

Several days had elapsed since the eastern party, accompanied by Mr. Blaisdell and Mr. Rivers, had returned to the city, and, as yet, nothing had been learned of their decision regarding the mine. The extra force of men on the Sunrise had returned to their regular shifts, and the work at the mining camp was going forward in the old routine, with the monotonous precision of clock-work.

Houston was quietly pursuing his own way, conscious



that the task before him involved difficulty and danger. He was aware that Haight, notwithstanding his obsequious politeness, was one of his worst enemies, and would injure him in every underhanded way within his power, as, beneath the smooth, smiling exterior, Houston could detect a deep, subtle malignity toward himself; and he rightly judged that Jim Maverick, the tool of the mining company, would be the instrument Haight would use when he was ready to work his revenge.

Maverick, from the first, had hated Houston with that instinctive hatred which such vile natures, groveling in their own degradation, always feel toward those moving on a higher plane, in an atmosphere untainted by the putrescence which is their natural element. Maverick knew that, to a man like Houston, his own baseness and villainy were written in his face, and even in his slouching, cringing gait, as plainly as though branded in letters of fire, and this was sufficient to kindle his anger against him, and Haight, by his talk, added fuel to the slowly smoldering fire. At home, but more particularly among the miners, in the camp or at the Y, Maverick expressed his views regarding Houston in language abounding with profanity and obscenity, and many were the muttered threats of what he would do should the object of his hatred ever cross his path.

Houston, meanwhile, was quick to discern the danger signals, and was laying his plans wisely and well. His own work in the office of the mining camp was nearly completed; there remained yet the information to be gathered from the Silver City office, to which he was now expecting to be called any day, and then the work of familiarizing himself with the mines. When this should be accomplished, the end, for which he was working and waiting, would be very near.

As he sat in the office one afternoon, reviewing the past few weeks, he felt that he had succeeded thus far, even beyond his hopes. The coming of Van Dorn and the acquaintance formed with Lindlay would be of untold value to him in his work. A little later, Van Dorn would come to his assistance without arousing suspicion, not being known as a mining expert, and when the time

came for the final denouement, Lindlay would accompany Mr. Cameron to the mines, as he was a skilled expert, and having already visited the mines, could furnish testimony as to the fraud practiced by the company.

Thus far, everything had gone well, and the weeks of work in a secluded mining camp, to which he had looked forward with anything but pleasurable anticipations, had in reality proven,—he was surprised to admit to himself,—among the pleasantest of his life. He would really have many regrets on leaving the mountains to return to his old home, he had formed such pleasant associations; and then, he suddenly became conscious that, of his life among the mountains, there was little he would miss, excepting a pair of dark, soulful eyes, in whose depths he had failed to detect the least shadow of falseness or unworthiness; mirrors of a sweet, womanly nature, strong, pure and beautiful, which with a quick, ready sympathy entered into his feelings, and often seemed to fathom his unspoken thoughts, and clothe them with language of her own.

Houston started in astonishment, and, locking the office, took a circuitous and little traveled road, determined to fully understand his own heart before he again looked into those eyes with their depths of sincerity and truth.

For many years he had been the recipient of flattering attentions from fond papas and aspiring mammas. Invitations to club dinners, banquets and the most recherche lunches, on the one hand, were evenly balanced by cards to receptions, soirees and afternoon teas, on the other. Had he passed heart-whole through all these sieges, only to fall a victim, here and now?

He had admired Miss Gladden from the first; then, in their mutual sympathy for Lyle, they had been drawn closer together, and since that time,—yes, he could see it all now.

Of Miss Gladden herself he knew very little, except that she was a true, noble woman; he needed no words to tell him that. Rutherford had learned from conversation with her, that she was an orphan, and had been traveling with friends because her home was made unpleasant by some of her relatives; and both had judged

that she was probably, in a measure, dependent upon wealthy relatives.

This much Houston did know, however, that he loved Leslie Gladden, that she was worthy of his love, and that life without her would not seem worth the living. He believed that she loved him, and his heart thrilled with the thought, that if so, it was for himself, not his wealth, that she cared. Before he reached the house, his mind was fully decided:

"I love her for herself," he soliloquized, "not caring whether she is rich or poor, and I believe she does, or will, love me in like manner. In any event, I must learn my fate before the arrival of my uncle."

As Houston approached the house, Miss Gladden and Lyle were standing together in the porch. He greeted both ladies with even more than his usual courtesy, but as his eyes met those of Miss Gladden, there was that in his glance, which in itself, was a declaration of his love for her. Lyle, with her quick intuition, read the meaning, and with her natural sense of delicacy, as quickly withdrew, leaving them together. For an instant, Miss Gladden's eyes dropped before Houston's glance, while a lovely color suffused her cheek; then she raised her eyes, meeting his with an answering glance, and in that mutual recognition, though no word was spoken, they knew that they were lovers, and that was enough for the present.

Of late, the four friends had spent much time together; sometimes climbing the mountains, to watch from their lofty summits the setting sun, slowly descending amid clouds of flame, whose glowing colors were reflected from the surrounding peaks in ever varying tints; the rose changing to amethyst and violet, and the violet deepening to purple; while far below, the canyon lay wrapped in soft, gray twilight. Or, sometimes, taking one or two boats from the little boat-house built for the accommodation of summer tourists, they rowed about the lake in the moonlight.

On this particular night, Rutherford proposed a row, in one of the larger boats, the entire length of the lake, to the cascades, to which the rest readily acceded. The

ladies soon appeared in light, fleecy wraps, Miss Gladden carrying a fine guitar, which called forth exclamations of pleasure from the gentlemen.

"Good!" said Rutherford, "that will be just the thing; now we will have some music."

"Miss Gladden," said Houston, "why have we not been favored in this way earlier?"

"Oh," she replied, archly, "it has never been a necessity until to-night, but a long row in the moonlight would not be perfect without music."

This was their first trip to the end of the lakes, and they found the scene beautiful beyond description. On one side an almost perpendicular wall of rock; in the opposite direction, the mountain ranges stretching far away in the distance, with snowy peaks gleaming here and there, like watch towers; while just before them, the shimmering cascades in the wondrous beauty of the moonlight, the deep, unceasing roar seeming to rise and fall with a rhythm of its own.

For the first few moments, they sat in silent admiration of the beauty around them; then Miss Gladden touched the strings of the guitar, and began singing in a rich contralto, in which Houston joined with a fine baritone, while Rutherford added a clear, sweet tenor. Their voices blended perfectly, and accompanied by the sweet notes of the guitar, the music floated out over the lake, the lingering echoes dying away, in the distance.

Lyle took no part in the song, but sat listening with parted lips and dreamy eyes. When the song was finished, she exclaimed:

"Oh, please do not stop, I love to listen to you; it reminds me of something I have heard long ago, I don't know when or where."

"Do you never sing, Miss Maverick?" asked Rutherford.

"Only sometimes for myself," she said, "I know only two or three songs that I have heard others sing."

"But you have a sweet voice," said Houston, "will you not sing for us?"

"If you will overlook any mistakes, I may," answered

Lyle, "for I probably do not sing correctly, as I know nothing of music."

"Certainly, Lyle, we would like to hear you," said Miss Gladden.

As simply, and as free from self-consciousness as a child, Lyle began her song, her eyes fixed on the distant shining peaks, and her only accompaniment the music of the cascades.

"Love is come with a song and a smile,  
Welcome love with a smile and a song;  
Love can stay but a little while:  
Why can not he stay?  
They call him away;  
Ye do him wrong, ye do him wrong,  
Love will stay for a whole life long."

Whether Lyle sang correctly that night was never known; even the beautiful words of the old song that seemed so appropriate to the occasion, were forgotten before she had sung more than two or three lines, and her listeners sat entranced, spell-bound, by the voice of the singer; a voice of such exquisite sweetness and clearness, and yet possessing such power and depth of expression, that it thrilled the hearts of her listeners, seeming to lift them out of all consciousness of their surroundings, and to transport them to another world; a world

"Where the singers, whose names are deathless,  
One with another make music, unheard of men."

As the last note died away, a long, deep sigh from Houston seemed to break the spell, and Miss Gladden looking up, her eyes shining with unshed tears, said, as she pressed Lyle's hand:

"My dear, we have found our song-queen, our night-ingle. We can all learn of you, and never equal you."

Houston had been strangely moved, and as he spoke, there was a slight tremor in his voice.

"I have heard, in all my life, but one voice like that, and that was one who died when I was a child."

Lyle looked surprised.

"Has no one ever told you you could sing?" asked Miss Gladden.

"I never sang for any one, excepting once, for Jack," answered Lyle.

"What did he say of your voice?" inquired Miss Gladden.

"He said, like Mr. Houston, that he had heard but one voice like mine, but that he did not like to hear me, so I have never sung since, excepting by myself."

"Lyle," said Miss Gladden suddenly, "how old is this man whom you call Jack?"

"Possibly forty, perhaps a little less," she answered indifferently.

A new thought had flashed into Miss Gladden's mind. For some time she had doubted whether Lyle were really a child of Maverick and his wife, she was so utterly unlike them; could it be possible that Jack, whose life seemed so much a mystery, was the father of Lyle? Was that the reason for his interest in her? and had Lyle had some beautiful mother,—unfortunate perhaps,—whose life had suddenly gone out, as the little life had just begun, and whose memory was recalled too vividly by Lyle's song? Miss Gladden determined, if possible, to find a clue to this mystery.

The boat was now on its homeward way, and a song with which all were familiar having been found, the four voices blended in exquisite harmony.

"It seems to me there are some rare treats in store for us," was Rutherford's comment, as the friends separated for the night; then, a few moments later, when alone with Houston, he exclaimed:

"By Jove, Houston! but what a voice that girl has! I never heard anything like it in my life. I didn't say much before Miss Gladden, for fear she might think I didn't appreciate her singing, and I certainly did, for she sings magnificently."

"You need have no fear of any sensitiveness on Miss Gladden's part," said Houston quickly, "in the first place, their voices are altogether different, there is no comparison between them; and in addition, Miss Gladden's regard for Lyle is so disinterested and unselfish, there

would be no room for any feeling of that kind. We must all acknowledge that Lyle certainly has a wonderful voice; as I said before, I have heard but one like it."

"Great Heavens!" said Rutherford, with more feeling than Houston had ever seen him manifest, "I'm sorry for that girl, Houston."

"Why?" asked Houston quietly.

"Why, only to think of her beauty and intellect, and such a voice as that, and then think of her parents, and the life to which she is tied down here."

"Granting the parents and present life," said Houston, "is that any argument that she will always be 'tied down here' as you say?"

"I think it would always fetter her in a measure; it will leave its imprint upon her mind, or at least her memory, and although she is not in her proper sphere here, yet her life here, and all its associations, would be likely to make her feel out of place in a higher sphere."

"I think not," said Houston, watching Rutherford closely, "I think if she could be removed from here, and given a thorough education, there would remain no trace whatever of the early life."

"But what about the question of heredity?" asked Rutherford, "there must be bad blood there, when and where would it make its appearance?"

"That would be a serious question," replied Houston, "providing she is the child of these people; I have always had grave doubts of that, and Miss Gladden has often expressed the same."

"By Jove! I never thought of that! It seems likely enough, too. What do you think, that she was stolen?"

"No," said Houston slowly, "that does not seem so probable as that she may have been some child that they were hired to take."

"In that case," said Rutherford, "I should think the uncertainty regarding her family and origin, would be almost as bad as the certainty in the other case."

"It might seem so to some people," Houston replied, adding with a smile, "especially to a Bostonian, who prided himself upon his 'blue blood'."

"Oh," said Rutherford, coloring, "I'm not pursuing

this inquiry on my own account at all, I was only thinking of her prospects generally. I'm not interested in that direction."

"In what direction are you interested, if I may ask?" said Houston, experiencing, for the first time, a little twinge of jealousy.

"In the direction of the 'Hub,' my dear boy," Rutherford replied, with another blush.

"Spoken like a true Bostonian!" said Houston approvingly.

"Yes, sir," continued Rutherford, "there's a little girl belongs back there in Boston, that's more to me than all the ladies you can produce in this part of the country, or any other, no matter how beautiful they may be; and she's not bad looking either. Her parents took her to Europe for a little trip this spring, and Boston seemed so lonesome, that was the reason I came west."

"Good for you, Ned, you have my best wishes," said Houston, shaking hands with his friend, "but really, you and Lyle had seemed so fond of each other's society lately, that I thought perhaps it was to be your destiny to rescue her from her unhappy fate."

"Well, as to each other's society," said Rutherford, very slowly, "of late we have been restricted to that or none, for you and Miss Gladden have been growing so unconscious of us, that we've had to console with each other; but then, I understood how 'twas, for I've been there myself, you know, and I'm ready to offer congratulations and all that sort of thing, whenever they are in order."

Houston appeared very unconscious of Rutherford's meaning, as he inquired, "How does Lylé herself regard your attentions? There must be no trifling with her, I have too much regard for her myself, for that."

"Miss Maverick is not a girl to be trifled with," replied Rutherford, "I think a good deal of her, since I am better acquainted with her, and respect her and she knows it, but I think she realizes the sort of anomalous position that she occupies, and that is why I say I am sorry for her. She is far too brilliant for her surroundings, and yet not fitted for a much higher place."



"Not at present," replied Houston, "but with her natural endowments and her innate delicacy and refinement, comparatively little training and culture would be necessary to fit her for almost any position in life."

"I wonder what will be her fate."

"Time will tell," replied Houston, who had his own plans.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

Houston had been called away to the office at Silver City, a telegram coming one afternoon for him to come down by the next train. Rutherford was at that time expecting to leave in a few days, to continue his pleasure trip to the coast, having already prolonged his stay among the mountains far beyond his first intentions; but at Houston's request, he agreed to remain over until the latter's return, which he expected would be in about ten days.

A few days after Houston's departure, Lyle started out one afternoon for the little cabin, at an hour a little later than she went to pursue her studies, or for reading. She knew that at this time, Jack usually came off his shift, as he and Mike were expert miners, and always completed their task some time in advance of the others.

She had not seen Jack since the visit of the party from the east, although she was at the cabin but a few evenings preceding that event, and had explained her long absence. Now she had special reasons for wishing to meet him, and she hastened on, hoping to find him alone. When she reached the cabin, Jack had just come from the mine, and Mike, fortunately, had gone down to the Y for needed supplies, and would not return for some hours.

After talking a little while, Lyle skillfully brought the conversation around to Mr. Houston, and stated that he was in Silver City.

"What is he doing there?" asked Jack, in a tone of surprise, "Is he going to remain there?"

"No, he has gone over temporarily to assist the com-

pany in that office, as he said they needed extra help; he thought he would be back in about ten days."

"He seems to make a very efficient clerk for the mining company," said Jack, with a peculiar emphasis which Lyle did not understand, but in which she detected a flavor of sarcasm.

"He seems efficient in whatever he undertakes," she replied with a light laugh, "clerking, fighting or love-making, he is successful in all."

"How has he succeeded in love-making?" asked Jack quickly.

"Ask Miss Gladden," was Lyle's smiling rejoinder.

"Is he really in love with her, do you think?"

"Judging by indications, it is a case of genuine love on both sides, which, contrary to the old proverb, does run smoothly so far. I think they are engaged."

"And you are left out in the cold?" asked Jack kindly, but watching her keenly.

"You would not think so, if you could know how kind they are to me," Lyle answered, "you and they are the only friends I have ever known."

"How about Mr. Rutherford? Isn't he a friend of yours, too?"

"Mr. Rutherford is a gentleman," she replied slowly, "he always treats me with respect, and we have very pleasant times together, but he never forgets that I belong to one station in life, and he to another. He is altogether unlike Mr. Houston and Miss Gladden; I wish you could know them, Jack, and that they could know you."

"They probably have no desire to form my acquaintance, and I have no need to form theirs. It is rather late in the day for me to make friends now."

"But Jack," said Lyle, in almost a pleading tone, "Miss Gladden wishes to meet you, and has repeatedly asked me to inquire if she might come and see you."

"What is her motive for wishing to see me?"

"I think because I have often spoken of you as my friend; then she said recently, that she would like, if possible, to take me east with her, and give me a musi-

cal education, and she would like to talk with you about it."

"Has she or Mr. Houston heard you sing?"

"Yes."

"What did they say of your voice?"

"Miss Gladden seems to think I have a wonderful voice, and Mr. Houston said he had heard but one like it in all his life."

Jack had risen, and was looking out of the window, his back toward Lyle; after a few moments he spoke, in an unusually gentle tone.

"You can say to Miss Gladden, that if she wishes to see me regarding you, she is welcome to come. Though I seldom receive callers, and have no wish to meet strangers, I am willing to meet a true friend of yours."

"Then, under those conditions," said Lyle, with almost a tone of triumph in her voice, "you would meet Mr. Houston."

"Why?" asked Jack, quickly, turning toward her.

"Because he is my friend."

Jack shook his head, and began pacing the room. "No," he said, as gently as ever, but very firmly, "I would rather not meet him."

Lyle looked troubled. "Jack," she said earnestly, "you have always appeared rather peculiar regarding Mr. Houston; tell me candidly, are you his friend, or his enemy?"

"Why!" he exclaimed in surprise, stopping before her, and looking into her earnest face, with a smile, "How should I be either? Am I not perfectly neutral? Are we not strangers?"

Lyle shook her head decidedly. "I cannot say whether or not you are strangers, but you are not neutral toward him; I have seen all along that you have some strong feeling toward him, but whether of kindness or enmity, I cannot tell, but I must know."

"Why must you know?" he asked, resuming his walk.

"Perhaps I can tell you later," she replied, "but, as you are my friend, I must know whether you are, or will be, his friend, or his enemy."

For some moments Jack was silent, and when he spoke his voice was full of some strong emotion:

"My dear child, I have no reason for any enmity toward him, and if he is the true, honorable man that you think he is, God knows I would stand by him, even to death itself."

"Then, if he was in difficulty or danger, and needed help, you would help him, would you not?" asked Lyle eagerly.

"My child," he answered gravely, "you must explain yourself; you certainly can trust me. I promise you this, I will not harm him or betray him, whatever may be the difficulty."

"You are sure there is no one to hear us?"

"I will make sure," he answered briefly, and bidding the collie guard the outside door, he then closed the door between the two rooms, and sat down near Lyle.

"You remember," she began, "the evening you passed our house?" He nodded. "Well, among the strangers there that night, were an English expert, Mr. Lindlay, and a Mr. Van Dorn, who, they said, was an inventor of some mining machinery. A little while after you passed, I took a book and went out by the lake to read, sitting down behind a thick group of small evergreens. I read as long as I could see, and then sat for some time, thinking, and watching the reflection of the moon in the lake. Then the moon went behind that tall peak, you know, across the lake, and it was quite dark; but I remained there thinking so deeply that, although for a few minutes I heard low voices talking, I paid no attention to it, supposing it was simply some people going up the mountain, till suddenly I was aroused by Mr. Houston's voice, only a few feet from me, saying in a low tone, 'There may be considerable danger ahead of us, but you are just the one I need, and you will be well compensated,' and Mr. Van Dorn answered, 'Hang compensation! if I can help you get the best of these rascals, I'm going to do it, just for the gratification of the thing,' and then I heard the Englishman, with his peculiar accent, saying something I couldn't quite catch, but it seemed to

be to the effect that he would help Mr. Houston against what he called the 'domned scoundrels.'

"At first, I wanted to leave, but I couldn't without their seeing me, and having to make explanations, and making it embarrassing all round; and then the thought flashed through my mind that Mr. Houston was a good friend of mine, and perhaps if I stayed, I might be able to help him if he should be in any danger later, as he spoke of, so I remained there.

"I haven't time to tell you all I heard, but this is what I learned: He is not a clerk at all, but is out here in the interest of some rich company in the east, with which an uncle of his is connected. This eastern company have for some time suspected crooked work on the part of the company here, and he has come out in the capacity of bookkeeper and clerk to get all the information he can against them. He has obtained all the proofs he can get in this office, and said he was going over in a few days to the main office at Silver City,—and that is where he is now,—to see what he can find against them there. When he returns he is going to examine the mines that this eastern company own, as fast as he can get opportunities, and it seems this Mr. Van Dorn is a mining expert himself, though no one out here knows it, and when Mr. Houston is ready, he is to come out here with some of his mining machinery that he is going to set up in the mills, to show the company his new method of reducing ores, but his real object in coming will be to help Mr. Houston carry on his investigations against the company. Then, when they have obtained all the information and proof they need, they will telegraph Mr. Houston's uncle,—Mr. Cameron, I think was his name,—and he and the English expert will come out together, unexpectedly to the company, and I think they said they would prosecute the officers of the company for fraud."

Jack's face was concealed with one hand, but Lyle could see that he had grown very pale, and beneath the heavy, black beard, his lips were moving under the influence of some deep emotion. She continued:

"My reason for wishing to confide this to you was, that I heard Mr. Van Dorn ask Mr. Houston if there

was any one among the miners whom he could trust to help them, as he said without the assistance of some one, familiar with the mines and their different workings, the undertaking would be much more difficult and dangerous; and I thought at once of you, Jack. You have often told me of the dishonesty and fraud practiced by the company, and said that you would like to see some of their schemes exposed, and I thought you would be just the one to help Mr. Houston, and no one would be likely to suspect you either."

She paused a moment, then added, "He has enemies working against him, and he ought to have some one to help him."

"Who are his enemies?" asked Jack.

"Haight, for one, and my father and all the men that he can influence; and you know, that if they once suspected what he is doing, they would not hesitate, for one moment, to kill him."

"They would not," said Jack, quietly but decidedly, "and among the mines it is a very easy thing to put a man out of the way."

"Then you will look out for him, and help him, will you not?" said Lyle, rising to go.

"Yes, child," he answered with unusual tenderness, "you do not know what you are asking, but since hearing what you have told me, no harm shall come to your friend that I can prevent, no matter what it costs me."

"But Jack," said Lyle anxiously, going to him and laying her hands in his, "this will not put you in danger, will it? My idea was that you could give him information, and no one would ever suspect you; but you have been too true a friend to me, for me to put you in any danger."

"You need have no fear," he answered, "I did not refer to any particular danger of that kind. I am only glad you have told me what you have. Had I learned it in any other way, I would have wished to help your friend. When he returns, say nothing to him of having asked me to help him; I will find him in my own way."

Lyle thanked Jack heartily, and as she looked up into his face, her beautiful eyes unusually bright, and her

cheeks flushed with emotion, he seemed **strangely** touched, and bending over her, kissed her reverently on her forehead, for the first time in their acquaintance.

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## CHAPTER XX.

Nearly a week after the departure of Houston for Silver City, as Morgan was passing the sorting rooms one morning, on his way from the mines to the mills, he heard Haight calling him.

"Hello, there, Morgan, the Sunrise deal is off."

"Off? who says so? Got a wire from the boss?"

"Yes, she just came, about fifteen minutes ago."

"What's the matter? did the old man say?"

"Nothing very definite; 'party writes property not satisfactory,' that's all he says."

"Hang it! I should think it looked good enough for 'em. Well," he growled, "there's so much hard work gone for nothing," and thrusting his hands deeper into his pockets in his disgust, Morgan started on his way, but Haight detained him.

"Hold on a minute; say, Morgan, you don't suppose that they caught on to our deal, do you? or that anybody put 'em onto it?"

"Who was there to put 'em onto anything?" asked Morgan.

"Oh, the confidential clerk, may be; he was on such good terms with Johnny Bull and the dude."

Morgan shook his head. "He's too much of a sucker for the company, and knows too well which side his bread is buttered, for business of that kind."

"I don't know about that," said Haight, "he's a dude and a tenderfoot himself, and likes to toady around with those eastern snobs; what else were they hob-nobbing with him for, if they didn't think they could get some information out of him? I've got my own ideas on that subject and I'm going to make some investigations, and if I find I'm correct, he'll find pretty quick where he will be; I've no use for him any way."

"I haven't any more use for him than you have," answered Morgan, "but he ain't a very safe fellow to fool with now, I can tell you, and I don't think you want to run up against him yourself."

"I don't know as I've said anything about running up against anybody," said Haight, "that isn't my style, but I'll run him out of this country in one way or another, see if I don't."

"You think you're pretty smooth," Morgan called over his shoulder, as he started for the mills, "and if you want to undertake the job, all right; for my part, I don't care to have much to do with him."

Two or three evenings later, as Lyle sat in her favorite nook beside the lake, book in hand, watching for the return of Miss Gladden who had gone with Rutherford for a short row, she was much surprised to see Haight approaching, wearing his most ingratiating smile. For a day or two, he had, on several occasions, when unobserved by the others, treated her with a marked politeness intended to be very flattering, for the thought had occurred to him that possibly through her he might get some information regarding Houston.

"Ah," he said now, seating himself at a little distance from her, and with a glance at the book which she had closed and laid aside, "I fear I have interrupted your reading."

"I was not reading," she replied, "I was merely glancing over a book of Miss Gladden's while awaiting her return."

For a few moments he talked in a light, frivolous manner, but Lyle, suspicious of some ulterior motive in his coming, did not respond very favorably to his efforts at conversation. At last he said, very pleasantly:

"This is a favorite resort of yours, is it not, Miss Maverick?"

"Yes, I come here frequently," she replied.

"I judged so," he continued carelessly, "I saw you out here the evening the eastern party was at the house, and I remember the English expert and his friend took a walk in this direction, with Mr. Houston. I suppose they were talking over the mine they had looked at, and



took Mr. Houston along thinking he might be able to give them any additional information they needed. I wonder what they thought about that mine," he added, watching Lyle, "I suppose you must have overheard some of their conversation."

Lyle was not taken off guard, however, and answered indifferently, "I heard voices, but I was so absorbed in thought I paid little attention to them; it was some time before I even recognized them."

"But you certainly must have overheard some of their conversation," said Haight, in his smoothest tones, "can you not recall anything said about the mine?"

"There was nothing whatever said about the mine," she replied, "and if there had been, I am not in the habit of listening to conversations and repeating them."

"Of course not, under ordinary circumstances," Haight rejoined, smiling, "but you know 'all is fair in love and war' and in mining deals, and as I am interested in behalf of the company, and we have, as yet, heard nothing from the party, you see I naturally had a little curiosity regarding their conversation that evening. You are sure they said nothing of the mine, or that Mr. Houston gave them no information?"

Lyle rose, her eyes flashing with scorn and indignation, as she replied, "Why should Mr. Houston give them any information? As I have told you, there was nothing said about the mine; so far as I could judge, the gentlemen were talking of their own personal affairs; and it is false that you have received no word from the eastern party, for I heard you and Morgan talking at the table yesterday of the deal having fallen through, and you suspect Mr. Houston of dishonorable conduct only because you judge every one to be like yourself," and without giving him opportunity to reply, she turned and walked in the opposite direction toward the boat which she saw approaching in the distance.

Haight walked away toward the house, conscious that his interview had been a failure, but more than ever determined to work his revenge upon Houston, and upon Lyle also, when the right time came.

Lyle determined, for the present, to say nothing re-

garding the interview, and met her friends without any allusion to what had just occurred.

After assisting Miss Gladden ashore, Rutherford returned to the boat, while Miss Gladden and Lyle started homeward. The former could detect in Lyle's manner signs of unusual excitement, but asked no questions, as she did not think it best to force her confidence.

"Lyle, when are you going to take me to call on your friend, Jack?" she inquired.

"Any time you wish," Lyle answered, "I spoke to him the other day about your coming, and he said you would be most welcome."

"Then he graciously consented to receive me! Very well, suppose we go now, it is not late."

Arriving at the cabin, they found Jack and Mike sitting outside the door, watching the last fleeting colors of the gorgeous sunset. Miss Gladden was duly introduced and invited within, and since the bashful Irishman could not be prevailed upon to enter the cabin, Jack entertained his guests alone.

Miss Gladden, from Lyle's description of her friend, had expected to find in Jack a gentleman, but she was totally unprepared for the polished courtesy, the courtly ease and grace without a trace of self-consciousness or restraint, with which, though clad in rough, miner's clothes, he received her in the little cabin, and as she conversed with him, she found her respect for him increasing every moment.

To Jack, isolated as he had been for years from refined, intellectual associations, it seemed like a glimpse into another, and not unfamiliar world, and the deference and respect expressed in Miss Gladden's manner were especially gratifying.

Very easily Miss Gladden led the conversation, avoiding, with intuitive delicacy, all allusions to himself or his surroundings, till at last she said:

"I have taken such an interest in my friend, Lyle, and she has so often spoken of your kindness to her, that I have wished to meet you. for I feel that in her welfare, we have a mutual interest."

Jack smiled gravely, as he replied, "I have endeavored

to help her as best I could under existing conditions, and notwithstanding the fact that the ways and means have been exceedingly restricted, she has proven herself an apt pupil, and has made good progress."

"Indeed she has," said Miss Gladden, "and with her ability, it seems a pity that she should not have every possible advantage."

"To me," he replied, "it seems a great pity that so much of her life has already been spent among such disadvantages, the greater part of the most valuable portion of her life wasted."

"Not entirely wasted," said Miss Gladden, "for what you have taught her will be of inestimable value to her always."

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Lyle, "what would my life have been without you?"

"I have laid the foundation so far as I was able," said Jack, smiling, "but it was time, long ago, for the superstructure to be builded."

"One reason why I wish to see you," continued Miss Gladden, "was to ask you what you would think of the feasibility of my taking Lyle east with me, when I return."

"If you are willing to do that, Miss Gladden," said Jack, slowly, "I can see nothing in the way of its practicability except to gain the consent of Mr. and Mrs. Maverick, and that might prove a formidable obstacle."

"He does not call them her parents," thought Miss Gladden, "does he know she is not their child?"

Jack continued. "If it had not been for that difficulty, I would gladly myself have furnished the means for a moderate education for Lyle, but I knew Maverick's decided objection to her possessing even the most rudimentary knowledge. I am of the opinion also, though I may be in error, that he would not allow her to leave home."

"You are right, Jack," said Lyle, "if I were to wait for his consent, I would never leave here, or have any advantages."

"May I inquire," said Jack, addressing Miss Gladden, "at what time you expect to return east?"

A faint color tinged Miss Gladden's cheek, as she replied:

"I have not yet decided just when I will go east, but probably the latter part of the summer."

"Ah, well," he answered, with a slight smile, "I hope that between now and that time, some arrangement can be made to Lyle's advantage; but if I may make any suggestion, it would be this; that nothing be said at present regarding this subject to either Mr. or Mrs. Maverick, as it would only arouse their opposition, and perhaps lead to some unpleasant results."

After a few moments' further conversation, Miss Gladden thanked Jack for his kindness, and rose to go. At the door they found Mike, and while Lyle chatted merrily with the witty Irishman for a moment, Miss Gladden turned toward Jack, saying in a low tone:

"I would like to have a talk with you regarding Lyle, some time when she is not present; may I come and see you by myself some day?"

"Certainly," he responded, "I would be pleased to see you."

For a moment, Miss Gladden stood in silent admiration, watching this man whose life seemed wrapped in so much mystery, while he replied to some laughing questions of Lyle's.

He was, even now, a splendid specimen of manhood, although his shoulders were slightly stooped, and silver threads gleamed here and there in the black hair and beard, making him look older than his years. He had a face of remarkable beauty also,—with fine, clear-cut features,—though browned with exposure, and bearing the lines that only the fingers of sorrow can trace. His face did not resemble Houston's in the least, but something in his manner reminded Miss Gladden of her lover, and she watched him with a sort of fascination.

As she and Lyle walked homeward together, the latter asked:

"What do you think now of my friend, Miss Gladden?"

And Miss Gladden replied thoughtfully, "I think, my dear, that he is one of earth's heroes."

## CHAPTER XXI.

The ten days which Houston was to spend at Silver City had expired, and his work there was completed. He had followed much the same plan as in the office at the camp, doing the work of the company by day, and pursuing his own investigations at night.

Mr. Blaisdell had at first objected to his working evenings, telling him the company had no wish to make a slave of him, but upon Houston's representing that it was an absolute necessity in order to accomplish the needed work within a given time, he allowed him to have his own way. He had been able to get together much additional proof regarding the fraudulent transactions of the company, even ascertaining in what direction much of the revenue due the New York company had gone.

He was present when the company received the brief but pointed letter from Mr. Winters, in which he stated that the property shown them had not been what they were looking for, and that they had found something more satisfactory in another direction.

"Well, Blaisdell," said Mr. Rivers, in his quick, incisive way, "I'm not in the least surprised."

"Not surprised!" echoed Mr. Blaisdell, "Why not? I confess I'm surprised and disappointed."

"It's just what I expected," again chirped Mr. Rivers, "just what I told you all along."

"I knew you said you were rather suspicious just in the direction where I felt the surest of them."

"Just so," said Mr. Rivers, "I said all along, 'those fish won't bite worth a nickel.'"

"Well," said Mr. Blaisdell, with a heavy sigh, "all we can do is to try again."

"And next time, I'd advise you to have a little more bait, or else don't tackle so big a fish."

It was Houston's last evening in Silver City, and he

sat in the hotel lobby reading letters which had just come from his uncle and Van Dorn, under cover from the Chicago firm, as usual.

Mr. Cameron was delighted to have met Van Dorn and the Englishman, and had engaged both men to remain in New York, awaiting word from Houston, when he should be ready.

The closing paragraph in Van Dorn's letter he read and re-read with a smile, it was so characteristic of his friend:

"I have had one of my machines carefully packed, and it now stands addressed, ready to accompany me to your mining camp on short notice, where I will show your people the latest method for the reduction of ores; and if the mining company itself is not pretty well 'reduced' before we get through, my name is not that of

Your friend,

ARTHUR VAN DORN.

P. S. 'The mills of the gods grind slowly,  
But they grind exceeding small.'"

As Houston folded his letters, his attention was attracted by loud talk among a group of men in another part of the lobby. Sauntering in that direction, he heard an excited voice exclaim:

"I tell you, they're the biggest frauds on the face of the earth. If there's a dishonest scheme, or a sharp, underhanded little game that they're not onto, I'd like to know what it is."

"Which company do you mean?" inquired another speaker.

"I mean the mining company represented by Rivers and Blaisdell, with old Wilson as a figure-head. I can't remember all their long-winded names, but the whole combination is rotten, from beginning to end, nothing but a set of lying, scheming, thieving rascals."

"That's right," said an old gentleman who had not spoken before, "they're a tough lot."

"Tough!" echoed the first speaker, "I should say so!

One of their little games is to take charge of mining claims for eastern parties. The parties send on money for development work, but do you suppose it is used in developing the mines? Not much! By and by, the first these parties know, they have forfeited their claims through lack of representation, but don't you think the company are not watching out, ready to jump the claim the very day the time expires. Sometimes they'll hire some poor Swede to locate the claim for them, and then assign it to them for a trifle. In that way, I've heard of their getting possession of the same claim over and over again."

"I've heard pretty hard stories about Blaisdell," said another, "but I guess he don't make much for himself, for as fast as he fleeces other people, Rivers fleeces him."

There was considerable more talk in the same strain, but after the group had separated, Houston, who had learned the name of the principal speaker, approached him as he was standing alone, and said, in a low tone:

"This is Mr. Hartwell, I believe; my name is Houston. Mr. Hartwell, I heard your remarks a little while ago concerning the North Western Mining Company and its officers. I am one of the clerks of that company, and I wish to know if you are prepared to substantiate the statements you have made here to-night."

"Yes," the man exclaimed with an oath, "I'll substantiate every word I've said here to-night, and I can get you a dozen more that will tell you more about that company than I can."

"Never mind about the others, for the present," replied Houston coolly, "what you have said to-night is likely to come to the ears of the company, and what I want to know is this; would you swear in court to what you have said here?"

"I tell you," said Mr. Hartwell, with another oath, "I'll swear to it ten times over, and if I ever have a chance, I'll down you and your cursed company till you won't know that you ever existed," and then seeming to take Houston as the representative of the entire corporation, he poured upon him a torrent of vituperation and abuse which was very amusing to Houston,

who was only thinking of securing a witness for the prosecution, by and by.

"Well, Mr. Hartwell," he said at last, "you seem so anxious to express your feelings, we may give you an opportunity later. For the present, I wish you good evening," and he walked smilingly away.

Mr. Hartwell looked after him in amazement; "By George!" he soliloquized, "but that fellow's a cool duck, anyhow! I couldn't faze him a particle."

The next morning, Houston, in company with Mr. Blaisdell, took the early train for the mines. He could not help contrasting this with his first trip over the same road. Then, he was a stranger, with his entire work before him, uncertain of success in his undertaking; now, his preparatory work was nearly done, and though the most difficult part of his task yet remained, he felt that success was sure. But the contrast which to him seemed most striking, was in his own feelings, for though conscious of enemies and having no knowledge of the friends ready to assist him, he yet felt a certain pleasure in returning to the mines, as though returning home; and he realized as never before, that hidden away in the heart of the mountains was the source from which henceforth must flow all his earthly happiness.

Arriving at the office, they found no one there, and Houston immediately began an attack upon the work accumulated during his absence, while Mr. Blaisdell proceeded to the mills and mines.

On his way he met Haight, and the subject of the unsuccessful mining deal was at once taken up.

"They simply wrote that the property was not what they wanted, and that they had found what they were looking for elsewhere," said Mr. Blaisdell in explanation.

"They seemed well enough satisfied when they were here," remarked Haight.

"That was my impression," said Mr. Blaisdell, "but Rivers seems to think differently. He says he was suspicious of them all the time, because they said nothing one way or another, after seeing the property; but my impression was that they were very well pleased."



"Certainly," answered Haight, who always made it a practice to have his opinions coincide with those expressed by the person with whom he happened to be talking, especially if it were for his interest to do so; "everything seemed satisfactory as far as I could judge. It is my opinion, Mr. Blaisdell, and has been for some time, that something must have been said by some one to prejudice those people against the mine; that is the only way I could account for the deal falling through as it did."

"But who was there to say anything prejudicial? We were all interested in selling the mine."

"I don't care to call any names, Mr. Blaisdell, but I don't think it best to take people into our confidence till we are pretty sure of them."

"Oh, you allude to Mr. Houston, but you are mistaken there; why, Haight, that fellow is working for our interests, and he has saved the company considerable money already in the way he has straightened the books and detected crooked work; he's going to be invaluable."

"He'll work for our interests just as long as it is for his interest to do so, but I imagine anybody could buy him off pretty easy. He's one of your swells; see how he dresses and what hightoned notions he has for a man in his position, and then tell me he wouldn't take a little tip on the outside if he got a chance."

"I think you are mistaken," said Mr. Blaisdell slowly, "still, of course, there might be something in what you say; I'll think it over," and the subject was dropped for that day.

Houston was very busy until nearly noon, but left the office a little earlier than usual, as he was anxious to meet Miss Gladden a few moments in advance of the others, if possible.

She was outside the porch, training some vines which she and Lyle had transplanted from among the rocks by the lake. Her back was toward the road, but hearing Houston's step, as he approached the house, she quickly turned, and in the depths of her luminous eyes he read a welcome that made his return seem more than ever

like a home-coming. Claspng warmly the shapely little hand extended to him in greeting, he drew it within his arm, and having led her to a comfortable seat within the porch, he drew his own chair close beside her, where he could watch the lovely face, so classic and perfect in its beauty, and clothed, when animated, with a subtle, spirituelle radiance.

"You are very welcome," said Miss Gladden, as he seated himself, "we will all have to celebrate your return, for we have missed you very much. Have you been well?"

"Very well," replied Houston, smiling, "except for a touch of homesickness occasionally when I remembered our evenings among the mountains, or on the lake. It was fortunate that my evenings were so crowded with work, or the malady might have proved quite serious."

"Our evenings have not been nearly so pleasant without you," said Miss Gladden, "we were all becoming frightfully dull and vapid, but I think we will now recover our spirits."

"I have learned one thing," said Houston, "that it is not any particular place or surroundings that constitutes home for us, so much as the presence of those who are dear to us. Imagine how it would have seemed to me, three months ago, to have called this place 'home,' but it seems wonderfully home-like to me to-day."

"As to what constitutes a home, I am scarcely qualified to judge," said Miss Gladden, "for I hardly know what a home is; but my idea is, that any spot where my best loved ones were, would be home to me."

"And with such sentiments as those," Houston responded, "you would make any spot on earth home to those whom you loved."

"I should hope to," she replied, and added archly, "and if they loved me, I think I would succeed."

"I fear," said Houston, smiling, "that we are very old fashioned and far behind the spirit of modern times, which considers love of small account in the elements that constitute a home."

"I consider it an indispensable element, nevertheless," she replied, earnestly, "for I have seen too much of so-

called homes where it did not exist, and they were not even successful imitations of the genuine article; their hollowness and wretchedness were only too apparent." She paused a moment, then continued:

"To me, the home seems like one of the old-time temples; a place to be kept sacred to peace and purity and love; from which the sin and strife of the outside world should be faithfully excluded; whose inmates, on entering, should leave behind all traces of the evil and discord of the outer world, as the Oriental leaves his dust-laden sandals at the door of his sanctuary."

"I have never known any other than such a home as that," said Houston, slowly, "and it is the only true home."

"Pardon me," said Miss Gladden, "but are your parents living? I have often wondered."

"No," he replied, "my parents died when I was a mere child, but the faint recollection of my early home, and the memory of my uncle's home, which has been mine also, correspond very closely with the picture you have just drawn."

"Then with you it is a reality," she answered, "but with me, only an ideal."

"Miss Gladden," said Houston very earnestly, but with great tenderness, "will you not let me help you to make a reality of your ideal?" Then, as she did not immediately reply, he continued, "The love that we believe in as the foundation of a true home, is not lacking on my part. I love you, Leslie, so much that life with you anywhere would seem perfect and complete, while life without you, even in a palace, would not seem worth the living. Can you love me enough to share my life and home, whatever it may be, as my wife?"

He had taken her hand, and she did not withdraw it, but looking in his face, she asked:

"Would you make me your wife, knowing so little of me as you do?"

"I think I know enough," he replied, "I know that you are a pure, true-hearted woman; I know that whether you love me or not," her eyes dropped, "there is no one you love better than me; and though I do not

know it, I am almost sure that you do care for me in some degree, am I not right?"

She looked up into the face bending over her, and Houston read his answer in her eyes, and even had she tried to speak, he gave her no opportunity for doing so.

"To think of your conceit!" exclaimed Miss Gladden, a few moments later, "in having the assurance to say that I cared for no one more than you, whether I loved you or not; how did you ever come to make such an assertion?"

"Your eyes betrayed you," he answered, while she blushed, "they often tell tales, but I have noticed they always tell the truth, and I knew they would never have told me some secrets that they have, if there was any one else you cared for."

The sound of approaching footsteps interrupted their conversation, and brought them back to the common, every-day affairs of life, and turning, they saw Rutherford coming up the path from the lake, where he had gone for a stroll.

"Hello, Houston!" exclaimed the latter, catching a glimpse of his friend, "when did you come? Well, I'm awfully glad you've got back, we've missed you, old fellow, I can tell you."

"Welcome home!" said a sweet voice, and Houston saw the starry eyes and golden crowned head of Lyle framed in the door-way, and hastened to greet her. She met him with a woman's grace, and with a child's affection looking frankly out of her lovely eyes. After his brief absence, Houston was impressed by her beauty as never before. "I didn't know the child was so beautiful," he thought to himself, "I believe she grows lovelier every day, and she reminds me strangely of some one I have seen long ago."

"Oh, by the way," said Rutherford, as the friends seated themselves around the dinner table, "I've just received a letter from my brother, and he says he is coming out here."

"Your brother!" exclaimed Miss Gladden and Houston, "What! coming here among the mountains?"

"Yes," he replied, "he happened to be in New York

when Van Dorn got back, and from his description of the place, and mine, he says he would like to see it. He is coming out to the coast by another route, and wants me to meet him in San Francisco, and then we will stop here on our return."

"Then you are coming back again," said Miss Gladden; "that will be lovely, and we will be delighted to meet your brother with you."

"Indeed we will," added Houston cordially, "what time do you expect to be here, Ned?"

"My brother wants to get here, he says, in about six or eight weeks, so it will probably be some time in August."

Lyle had said nothing, but had listened to the conversation, a thoughtful, far-away look stealing into her eyes; and the rest of the boarders arriving just then, nothing more was said on the subject.

Haight greeted Houston with his usual smiling politeness, but Morgan looked sullen, and Mr. Blaisdell was gloomy and taciturn. Haight's influence was working, and he could afford to smile. Lyle was quick to note the situation, and also to detect in Haight's face an expression of ill-concealed triumph, and as their eyes met, he read that in her face that boded no good to himself.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

Mr. Blaisdell having returned to the city that same day, everything went forward in the same regular routine as prior to Houston's absence, and evening found the four friends seated on the summit of an immense rocky pile, watching the grand and rugged scenery surrounding them illumined by the glowing colors of the sunset sky. They had been talking of Rutherford's intended trip to the coast, when Miss Gladden said:

"Mr. Houston, how early can you join us to-morrow afternoon? We are going to have a little picnic party of four, in honor of your return, and also to give Mr.

Rutherford pleasant memories of his last days among the mountains."

"Oh," said Rutherford, "now I understand; I've wondered what you ladies were so mysterious about all day; you've been holding secret sessions and making cabalistical signs to each other all the afternoon. Well, as this picnic is partly on my account, I'm sure I feel flattered and shall be delighted to attend. Houston, old boy, when can we look for you?"

"I think, considering the importance of the occasion, I can be ready to join you at three o'clock," replied Houston, while the ladies expressed their approval.

"There seems to have been a great deal of mysterious consultation about this affair," remarked Rutherford, "what is the program for to-morrow?"

"Well," said Miss Gladden, "for one thing, we must have plenty of music; have neither of you gentlemen any musical instruments with you?"

"Not I," replied Houston, while Rutherford answered, laughing, "I have a banjo that I brought along to amuse myself with in case I got lonesome, but I've had no use for it so far, I've had such good company here."

"A very graceful compliment, thank you," said Miss Gladden, smiling, "but bring the banjo by all means, we will have use for it to-morrow, and I have just thought of something else for the occasion,—but I'm not going to divulge all my plans, we must keep something for a surprise, mustn't we, Lyle?"

Lyle laughed merrily; "I'm not going to tell a single plan of mine; you will all find when we reach the place, what a mountain picnic means."

"But can we not even know where we are going?" asked Rutherford, with a tragic air.

"You would not know if I should tell you," responded Lyle, "we are going to Sunset Park."

"Sunset Park!" they exclaimed, "where is that?"

"Is it in any way connected with the Sunrise mine of recent fame?" inquired Houston.

"No," replied Lyle, "it is across the lake; you remember the landing I showed you among the rocks? You follow the broad trail leading up the mountains.

and you will come to a beautiful plateau on the west side, as level as a floor,—but I'm not going to tell you about it, you must first see it for yourselves."

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, while Houston still stood talking with Miss Gladden and Rutherford, the graceful form of Lyle suddenly darted past them, her face nearly concealed by an enormous sunbonnet.

"Lyle, you gypsy, where are you going?" called Miss Gladden.

For answer, she turned and waved her hand with a merry laugh, then ran, fleet-footed as a deer, to the edge of the lake, and unfastening one of the little boats, was in it and rowing out upon the lake as dextrously as a professional oarsman, before those watching her could even guess her intentions.

"Great Cæsar! but that girl can row!" exclaimed Rutherford, with all the enthusiastic admiration of a newly graduated collegian.

"Where is the child going?" asked Houston.

"Probably to the picnic ground," said Miss Gladden, "but what for, I cannot imagine."

The sunbonnet was waved saucily in the air, and then instead of steering for the landing place as they expected, the boat suddenly disappeared around a corner of the rocks, in the opposite direction, while there came ringing out on the air, in mocking tones, the words of the old song:

"I saw the boat go 'round the bend."

No one saw Lyle when she returned, a couple of hours later, and not even Miss Gladden knew that she was in the house until she made her appearance at the dinner table, with a very demure face, exceedingly pink fingers, and wearing an air of deep mystery that no amount of joking could diminish.

After dinner, Lyle made two or three trips across the lake, carrying mysterious baskets and dishes. In one of these journeys she was intercepted by Miss Gladden, who was lying in wait for her, and who, tempted by the delightful aroma, lifted the cover of one of her dishes.

"Strawberries!" she exclaimed, "and wild ones! Where did you get them, Lyle? They are the first I have seen out here."

"They are the first that have ripened," she replied, "I went over to the gulch for them this morning, but don't say anything about them," she added, as she stepped into the boat with her treasures, "I'm going to cache them until they are needed."

"Going to do what?" said Miss Gladden.

"Going to 'cache' them, hide them away among the rocks," she replied laughing, and, taking the oars, she was soon speeding across the lake.

It was a merry party that started out two or three hours later. Houston carried the banjo, as Rutherford had his precious camera and a lot of plates, having declared his intention of immortalizing the occasion by taking a number of views for the benefit of their posterity. Miss Gladden had her guitar, and to the great astonishment of the gentlemen, Lyle appeared, carrying a fine old violin. It was Mike's, which she had borrowed for the occasion at the suggestion of Miss Gladden, and in reply to the expressions of wonder from the gentlemen, Miss Gladden said:

"This is the surprise I planned for you, but wait till you have heard her; I never heard her myself until a day or two ago."

With song and laughter they crossed the lake, and having reached the landing place among the rocks and fastened their boats, proceeded up the mountain. Here they found a flight of natural stone steps, at the head of which a broad trail wound around the mountain, until, having passed a huge, shelving rock, they suddenly found themselves on a plateau, broad, grassy, and, as Lyle had said, "as level as a floor."

Groups of large evergreens afforded a refreshing shade. Underneath the trees an immense, flat rock, covered with a snowy table-cloth and trimmed with vines and flowers, gave hint of some of the more substantial pleasures to be looked for later. At a distance gleamed the silvery cascades, their rainbow-tinted spray rising in a perpetual cloud of beauty. Far below could be seen



the winding, canyon road, while above and beyond, on all sides, the mountains reared their glistening crests against the sky.

For a time they gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the scene, till, at Miss Gladden's suggestion, the tuning of the various instruments began, interspersed with jokes and merry, rippling laughter. Amidst the general merriment, Houston, with an air of great gravity, produced from his pocket the different parts of a flute, which he proceeded to fit together, saying:

"When you were speaking last evening about the music for to-day I had entirely forgotten the existence of this flute, but after we went to our room, Ned persisted in practicing on that unmusical instrument of his, and in searching in my trunk for a weapon of self defense, I found this, and it answered my purpose so well then, I brought it with me to-day."

The music was a success, and it seemed as though the musicians would never grow weary, but when, at Miss Gladden's request, Lyle sang "Kathleen Mavourneen," her sweet, rich tones blending with the wild, plaintive notes of the violin, her listeners again seemed entranced by the witchery of the music, as on the night when first they heard her sing, and were only aroused by the sound of hearty, prolonged cheering from the canyon below.

Looking over the edge of the plateau, they discovered a party of about a dozen people, in a wagon drawn by six horses, who had stopped to listen to the music, and give their panting animals a chance to rest. Behind them was a line of three or four pack mules, laden with tents, cooking utensils and bedding.

"A camping party!" exclaimed Lyle, "the first of the season; they are on their way to Strawberry gulch."

On catching sight of the group above on the plateau, the ladies below began waving their handkerchiefs, and the gentlemen were loud in their cheers and calls for more music.

"Give them another song, Miss Maverick," said Rutherford, "that is a decided encore."

Once more raising her violin, Lyle sang "The Maid of Dundee," and never did song or singer meet with

nobler applause, for the cheers from below in the canyon were joined with those from above on the plateau, and were echoed and re-echoed among the rocks, the last reverberations dying away and mingling with the roar of the distant cascades.

As the camping party seemed in no haste to continue their journey, Miss Gladden with the gentlemen then came forward to the edge of the plateau, and all joined in singing a few familiar songs, some of them accompanied by the guitar and the violin, after which, the party in the canyon, with much waving of hats and handkerchiefs, and many cheers in token of their appreciation, passed on their way.

After this little episode, a gypsy fire was kindled, and in a short time the rock table was spread with a dainty feast; chicken sandwiches, mountain trout, which Lyle had caught in the morning, delicately broiled, and the sweet, wild strawberries served in various ways, all equally tempting and delicious. After the feast, Houston proved himself an adept upon the violin, and he and Rutherford gave a number of college songs, and old plantation songs and dances, accompanied by the violin and banjo.

At last, as the long, gray twilight was slowly deepening, and the stars silently marshaling their forces in the evening sky, the two boats drifted across the lake, only guided, not propelled, by the oars, and the air, for a while, was filled with song. As they slowly approached the shore, however, the singing gradually ceased. For a while Rutherford talked of the coming of his brother; then he and Lyle were silent, but from the other boat, at a little distance, came low, murmuring tones. They had just entered upon the first pages of that beautiful story, old as eternity itself, and as enduring; the only one of earth's stories upon whose closing page, as we gaze with eyes dim with the approaching shadows of death, we find no "finis" written, for it is to be continued in the shadowless life beyond.

Rutherford was thinking of some one far away, under European skies, and wishing that she were present with him there, to make his happiness complete.

And Lyle, with that face of wondrous beauty, yet calm and inscrutable as that of the sphinx, had any power as yet passed over the hidden depths of her woman's nature, and troubled the waters? Were those eyes, with their far-away look, gazing into the past with its strange darkness and mystery, or striving to pierce the dim, impenetrable veil of the future? No one could say; perhaps she herself was scarcely conscious, but as they landed, Miss Gladden noted the new expression dawning in her eyes, and as the friends and lovers separated for the night, each one avowing that day to have been one of the most delightful of their whole lives, she wound her arm about Lyle in sisterly fashion, and drew her into her own room. Lyle, as was her custom, dropped upon a low seat beside her friend, but was silent.

"Are you looking backward or forward, to-night, Lyle?" asked Miss Gladden, taking the lovely face in both her hands, and gazing into the beautiful eyes.

Lyle's color deepened slightly, as she replied:

"I hardly know; it seems sometimes as if I were looking into an altogether different life from this, a different world from that in which I have lived."

"How so, my dear?" inquired her friend.

"I scarcely know how to describe it myself," she replied; then asked abruptly, "Miss Gladden, do you believe we have ever had an existence prior to this? that we have lived on earth before, only amid different surroundings?"

"No," answered Miss Gladden, "I can see no reason for such a belief as that; but why do you ask?"

"Only because it seems sometimes as if that were the only way in which I could account for some of my strange impressions and feelings."

"Tell me about them," said Miss Gladden, interested.

"They are so vague," Lyle replied, "I hardly know how to describe them, but I have always felt them, more or less. When I read of life amid scenes of refinement and beauty, there is always an indefinable sense of familiarity about it all; and since you and Mr. Houston have been here, and I have lived such a different life,—especially since we have sung together so much,—the

impression is much more vivid than before; even the music seems familiar, as if I had heard it all, or something like it, long ago, and yet it is utterly impossible, living the life I have. It must have been only in my dreams, those strange dreams I used to have so often, and which come to me even now."

"And what are these dreams, dear? You have never before spoken to me of them."

"No," Lyle answered, "I have never spoken of them to any one; they have always been rather vague and indefinite, like the rest of my strange impressions and fancies; only they are all alike, it is almost precisely the same dream, no matter when it comes to me. There is only one feature that is very clear or distinct, and that is a beautiful face that is always bending over me, and always seems full of love and tenderness. Sometimes there are other faces in the background, but they are confused and indistinct,—I can only recall this one that is so beautiful. Then there is always a general sense of light and beauty, and sometimes I seem to hear music; and then it is all suddenly succeeded by an indescribable terror, in which the face vanishes, and from which I awake trembling with fright."

"And you say you have had this dream always?" queried Miss Gladden.

"Yes, ever since I could remember. I don't seem to be able to recall much about my early childhood, before I was five or six years old, but these dreams are among my earliest recollections, and I would sometimes awake crying with fright. After I met Jack, and he began teaching me, my mind was so taken up with study, that the dreams became less frequent, and for the last two or three years, I had almost forgotten them, till something seemed to recall them, and now it occurs often, especially after we have had an evening of song. I know I shall see that beautiful face to-night."

"But whose face is it, Lyle?" questioned Miss Gladden; "surely, it must resemble some one you have seen."

Lyle shook her head; "I have never seen any living person whom it resembled. That, together with all these strange impressions of which I have told you, is

what seems so mysterious, and leads me to half believe I have lived another life, sometime, somewhere."

Miss Gladden sat silently caressing the golden head. Her suspicions that Lyle had had other parents than those whom she knew as such, were almost confirmed, but would it be best, with no tangible proof, to hint such a thought to Lyle herself? While she was thus musing, Lyle continued:

"What seemed to me strangest of all, is, that though I cannot remember ever seeing a living face like the one in my dream, I have seen what I believe is a photograph of it."

"When? and where?" asked Miss Gladden quickly, hoping to find some key to the problem she was trying to solve.

"A few weeks after your coming, and at Jack's cabin," Lyle replied.

"Did Jack show you the picture?"

"No, I do not know that he intended me to see it, but it was lying on the table that evening; I took it up and looked at it, but he did not seem to want to talk about it. I have never seen it since, and he told me that until that evening, he had not seen it for a long time."

"And did you recognize it as the face of your dreams?"

"Not then; it seemed familiar, but it was not until after I reached home that I remembered my dream, and from that time, the dream returned. I see the face often now, and it is just like the picture, only possibly a little older and sweeter."

"And you have never spoken to Jack about the picture since?"

"No, for I have not seen it, and he has never alluded to it. He admitted that evening it was the picture of some one he had loved dearly, and I have since thought perhaps he would rather I had not seen it."

Miss Gladden was silent; her old theory regarding Jack's being the father of Lyle, seemed to her now more probable than ever. She believed the picture to be that of Lyle's own mother, who, it seemed evident, had lived long enough that her child remembered her in her

dreams, though unable to recall her face at other times.

Very tenderly she bade Lyle good-night, determined that her next call at the little cabin should be made as early as possible.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

Houston and Rutherford, on retiring to their room, after the breaking up of the picnic party, donned their slippers and smoking jackets, and having lighted their cigars, and slipped into the easiest possible attitudes, prepared to devote the next few hours to a confidential *tete-a-tete*. The next day Rutherford would start on his journey to the coast, and naturally there were many topics of mutual interest to be discussed on this, their last night together for a number of weeks.

Houston felt that the time had come for taking Rutherford into his confidence regarding his own work and plans, for it was evident that Van Dorn had posted his brother, and Rutherford would soon learn the truth from him, if in no other way. For a while Rutherford talked of his brother.

"I knew he was intending to come west this summer, and I expected to meet him in some of the cities along the coast, but I supposed he would return by one of the southern routes. I'm awfully glad he has decided to come back this way," he added, "for I would enjoy it of course, to come around and see you again, and then, I'd like to have you meet Mort. He and I are not a bit alike, but I think he's a splendid fellow, and I think you and he will like each other."

"I haven't a doubt of it, Ned," Houston replied, with an air of confidence rather surprising to his friend; "in fact, I think I will be as glad to meet him as you yourself;" then, as Rutherford's eyes expressed considerable wonder at such unexpected cordiality, he continued:

"I've been thinking, for some time, Ned, that the friendship you have shown for the low-salaried clerk and bookkeeper whom you met on your way out here, deserves some degree of confidence in return, and this

evening seems to be the best time for giving you a little explanation regarding the man whom you have called your friend for the last few weeks."

"Why, certainly, if you wish," Rutherford replied, with slight embarrassment, "but then, it isn't at all necessary, you know; that is, unless it is your choice, for your salary or your position doesn't cut any figure with me. Whatever your circumstances may be, I know as well as I need to know that you are a gentleman; anybody can see that, and I have told my brother so."

"I am much obliged to you, Ned," Houston answered, with difficulty restraining a smile, "but I am going to begin by saying that your brother knows me a great deal better than you do."

Rutherford's face expressed so much astonishment, that it resembled nothing so much as an exaggerated exclamation point. Houston continued:

"I have never in my life known what it was to have an own brother, but the one who for many years has held that place in my heart is Morton Rutherford, and I think he will tell you that of all his class mates, there was not one with whom he was upon more intimate, confidential terms, than Everard Houston, of New York."

"Everard Houston! Great Scott!" exclaimed Rutherford, springing to his feet, "why I remember that name well; he was Mort's best friend. You don't mean to say you are the same? Why, I thought you said you were from Chicago!"

"I was from Chicago, when you met me," answered Houston, smiling, "but I had come from New York less than ten days before."

"Well, by Jove!" said Rutherford, walking up and down the room, "I am floored completely! If you had once said you were from New York, I might have suspected who you were, but Chicago! and then," here he stopped and gazed at his friend with a comical look of perplexity, "why, Everard Houston was the nephew and adopted son of W. E. Cameron."

"Certainly," assented Houston.

"Well then, what in thunder,—if I may ask the ques-

tion,—are you doing out here with this confounded Buncombe-Boomerang mining company?"

"That is just what I wished to tell you to-night," Houston replied, "but we must talk low, for walls sometimes have ears," and placing a chair for his friend near his own, he proceeded to tell him of his object in coming out to the mining camp, of the work which he had accomplished, and of his plans for what yet remained to be done. Rutherford listened with much interest, deepening into admiration for his friend.

"And now," said Houston, in conclusion, "you will see why I could not very well reveal my identity to you when we first met. I knew you as soon as I saw your card, but I was a stranger in this part of the country, with a certain role to play, uncertain of success, and, not knowing what difficulties or obstacles I might meet, thought there would be less danger of unexpected complications, if you thought me just what I appeared to be."

"You thought about right, too," said Rutherford, "for I'm awfully careless about anything of that kind, always putting my foot in it, you know; and I don't see how you ever could come out here, a perfect stranger, and carry everything along as smoothly as you have. Well, I remember I was awfully mixed there on the train, when you told me you had come out here to work for that company, for I thought all the time that if you were not a gentleman, then I never saw one; and it's lucky I did have sense enough to think of that, or I might have made a confounded chump of myself."

"You would have cut me, would you?" asked Houston, laughing, "I was looking out for that, and would have considered it a rich joke if you had."

"Rather too rich, I should say," said Rutherford, coloring. "Mort has always ridiculed me for that sort of thing, and told me I'd make a precious fool of myself some day; I don't intend to be snobbish, though he says I am, but that's just my way somehow, unless I happen to like a person. Mort is different from me; he will get along with all sorts of people, you know, but I never could."



"You are all right," answered Houston, "you are a little conscious of your blue blood now and then, but as you grow older you will think less about that, and you have as good a heart as Morton, when a person is fortunate enough to find it."

"Say," said Rutherford, suddenly, "if you and Mort were class mates, you must have known Van Dorn."

"Certainly," said Houston, smilingly watching the blue coils of smoke from his cigar, "and when I first saw him with the Winters party, I knew my little game was up, unless I got my work in very expeditiously," and he described the little pantomime which took place in the office shortly after Van Dorn's arrival, much to the amusement of Rutherford, who exclaimed:

"Great Scott! but you fellows played that game well, no one ever would have dreamed that you had known each other."

Houston then told of the plan for Van Dorn's coming in a few weeks, and later, for the arrival of Mr. Cameron with Lindlay.

"Oh," Rutherford exclaimed, "now I see why Mort is so anxious to get here at just about a certain time; he knows all about this, and wants to be in at the death himself; well, that suits me exactly. But say, old fellow, isn't this going to be a pretty nasty piece of business for you about that time?"

"It would be if any one should get hold of this before the right time comes, but I do not anticipate any trouble, because I intend to be so guarded that nothing regarding my work will be known or suspected until my uncle is here, and we have them securely trapped."

"It will require a cool head and a level one to carry this thing through, and accomplish what you have undertaken," said Rutherford thoughtfully, as he took one or two turns up and down the room, "and I guess you are the right one for the work. Van Dorn will be just the one to help you, too, he's pretty cool and quick-witted himself, but I should think you would both need a third party, somebody who has been on the ground for a long time and who understands all about the working of these things."

"It would be of great assistance to us, and I intend to keep a look-out, and if it is possible to find such a person, and one whom we can trust at the same time, I shall secure him."

"Well, I'm sure I wish you success, and I shall be anxious to hear from you while I'm gone, and know how you are coming on."

They smoked silently for a few moments, then Rutherford said:

"By the way, Houston, how about the congratulations I told you some time ago I was ready to offer whenever the occasion required; are they in order now? or shall I reserve them until my return?"

"They are in order whenever you choose to offer them," Houston replied quietly.

"Indeed! well, I'm glad to hear it, I thought it about time. I congratulate you most heartily, and tender you both my sincerest wishes for your happiness. I tell you what, old fellow, I think you've found a splendid woman, and I think, too, that you are wonderfully suited to each other. Seems strange, doesn't it? to think of a pair like you two, finding each other in a place like this!"

"It is rather unusual, I admit," said Houston.

"Yes," added Rutherford, "taking into consideration all the surroundings, and the why and wherefore of your coming here, I think it borders on the romantic."

A moment later he asked, "Does Miss Gladden know what you are doing out here?" Houston shook his head, in reply.

"Doesn't she know who you really are?"

"Not yet," Houston answered, "no one out here knows any more about that than you did two hours ago."

"Whew!" said Rutherford, "she will be slightly surprised when she finds that old Blaisdell's clerk and book-keeper has a few cool millions of his own, won't she?"

"I hope she will not object to the millions," said Houston with a smile, "but I have the satisfaction of knowing that they were not the chief attraction; she cares for me myself, and for my own sake, not for the

sake of my wealth, and I am just old fashioned enough to consider that of first importance."

"And when will she learn your secret? not until the closing scene of the last act?"

"I cannot tell just when," Houston answered, "that will of course depend a great deal upon circumstances."

Rutherford then became confidential regarding his own hopes for the future, and gave Houston a description of his fiancée, and a brief history of their acquaintance and engagement.

"Grace is all right," he said in conclusion, "but her father is inclined to be a little old-fogyish, thinks we are too young for any definite engagement, and wants me to be permanently established in some business before we are married, and all that; when I can't see what in the deuce is the difference so long as I have plenty of stuff. So the upshot of it all was that he and his wife took Grace to Europe, and they're not coming back until the holidays, and if, by that time, we have neither of us changed our minds, and I am settled in business and all that sort of thing, we can be married. There's no danger of our changing our minds, so that's all right, but I declare I don't see the use of a fellow's tying himself down to some hum-drum business, when there's no need of it."

"It isn't a bad idea though to find some business for which you are adapted, and stick to it," was Houston's reply; "that was the advice my uncle gave me when I returned from college, and he offered me the choice of going into business with himself, or selecting something else that I liked better."

"Grace's father wants me to go in with him, but excuse me; if I went into business with any one, it would be somebody nearer my own age, where I'd have about as much to say as the other fellow, not an old man, and my father-in-law, in the bargain."

"You may find something you will like, within the next few months," said Houston, with a peculiar smile; "By the way, Morton used to say he was going to stick to journalistic work; how is he succeeding?"

"Splendidly; you know he is one of the associate

editors of the Dispatch, then he contributes regularly to several of the leading magazines, and lately he has some work of his own on hand besides, a work on some sort of scientific research: yes, he has succeeded well."

So long did their conversation continue, that when they at last went to rest, it was nearly time for the surrounding peaks, standing like huge sentinels against the dark, eastern sky, to catch the first faint flush of the approaching day.

They were a little late in making their appearance in the breakfast room. Miss Gladden and Lyle were awaiting them, but the others had gone. There was time for only a hasty breakfast before the team, going to the Y for supplies, which had been engaged to take Rutherford to the morning train, was at the door.

"Well," said the latter, having seen his baggage safely aboard, including the familiar square case containing his precious cameras, "I've had a delightful time here, and I'm awfully glad I'm coming back again."

"So are we, Mr. Rutherford," said Miss Gladden, "and we will be very glad to welcome your brother also, and do all in our power to make his visit a pleasant one."

"It is doubtful whether he will ever want to leave here," Rutherford responded, "for he appreciates anything of this kind even more than I do. He'll grow wild over these mountains. Well, Miss Maverick," he continued, shaking hands with Lyle, "I thank you for all you've done to make my visit so pleasant, and I'm glad that we will only say good-bye for a little while."

"I am also," she replied, "and I wish you a pleasant journey and a speedy return."

"This is not 'good-bye,' Mr. Rutherford," said Miss Gladden, extending her hand, "it is only 'au revoir.'"

"That is right," he answered, then added in low tones, "Miss Gladden, I have already congratulated Mr. Houston, and I hope you will accept my congratulations and best wishes also. I think almost as much of him as of my own brother, and I could not wish either of you any happier fortune than I believe you will find in each other."

In a few moments Houston and Rutherford were rid-

ing rapidly down the canyon. At the office, where Houston had to prepare some orders for the driver, he and Rutherford took leave of each other.

"Be good to yourself, old fellow," said Rutherford, "and keep us posted just how you are coming on; and say," he added, lowering his voice, "I'll keep you posted of our whereabouts, and if anything should happen, and you need help, wire us and we'll be here by the next train; you can count on two brothers now, instead of one, you know."

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#### CHAPTER XXIV.

A day or two after the departure of Rutherford, Miss Gladden, having learned from Lyle at what hour Jack usually completed his day's work, set forth upon her visit to the cabin. She felt that her errand might prove embarrassing both to Jack and herself; she wished to obtain some clue regarding Lyle's parentage; at least, to learn what his suspicions, or possible knowledge might be concerning the matter, and taking into consideration the contingency that she might be his own child, whose existence he had kept secret for reasons of his own, it was a subject which would require very delicate handling.

She found Jack at the cabin, and alone, and his courteous greeting, containing less formality and more cordiality and friendliness than on the former occasion, made her task seem far less difficult. He ushered her into the pleasant little sitting-room, and she noted even more particularly than on her former visit, the exquisite taste betrayed, not only in the furnishings of the room, but in their very arrangement.

After chatting a few moments regarding the little circle of friends at the house, in whom he seemed to take more interest than she would have expected from a man of his secluded life, the conversation naturally turned to Lyle, and Miss Gladden said:

"I have wished to see you regarding her because you seem to be the only one among those living here who

appreciates her ability, or cares for her welfare; and you have known her and her surroundings so long, I believed you could give me some suggestions and advice regarding what is best to be done for her, even now, while she remains here."

"I have taken a great interest in the child ever since I have known her," Jack replied, "and I am only too glad that she has found another friend, and that friend a lady; and if I can assist, by suggestion or otherwise, I shall be most happy to do so."

"I asked your opinion the other evening," continued Miss Gladden, "as to taking her east with me, but there were other matters pertaining to her welfare, on which I wished your opinion and advice, but I could not so well speak of them before her, so I asked for this interview."

Miss Gladden hesitated a moment, almost hoping that Jack might make some remark which would give her a cue as to the best method for her to pursue in seeking the information she desired, but his attitude was that of respectful attention, and he was evidently waiting for her to proceed.

"I have felt attracted toward Lyle from the first," she began slowly, "not alone by her wondrous beauty and grace of manner, but even more by her intelligence and intellectual ability, her natural refinement and delicacy, which, considering her surroundings, seemed to me simply inexplicable. From the very first, she has been to me a mystery, and as I become better acquainted with her, the mystery, instead of being lessened, is only deepened."

She paused, but he offered no comment, only bowed gravely for her to continue.

"I could not, and I cannot yet, understand how one like her could ever have been born, or could exist in such surroundings as hers; and the fact that she has existed here, her beautiful nature untainted, unsullied by the coarseness, the vulgarity and the immorality about her, to me seemed an indication that she was of an altogether different type, born in another and far higher sphere. I saw she was unhappy, and I determined to win her confidence, and in so doing, from a vague sus-

picion I have gradually arrived at a firm conviction that Lyle is not the child of those whom she calls her parents."

Jack manifested no surprise, neither was there anything in his manner to indicate that this was a subject upon which he had any knowledge. He simply asked very calmly,—almost indifferently it seemed to Miss Gladden,—

"Have you discovered any direct evidence in support of this conviction that she is not their child?"

"No tangible evidence," replied Miss Gladden, "nothing, of course, that could be called proof, but there are what I consider very strong indications."

"Are the indications on Lyle's part, or on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Maverick?" inquired Jack.

"On both sides," replied Miss Gladden, "I have very little to say regarding Mrs. Maverick; she is a kind-hearted woman, and seems to treat Lyle with consideration and some degree of affection; there is very little of the latter, but perhaps it is all of which she is capable, for I should think life with that brute would quickly crush out all the affection, if not all the intelligence, in a woman's nature; but the neglect and ill treatment of Maverick himself towards Lyle surely indicate that she is no child of his."

"Your remark regarding Mrs. Maverick might be still more applicable to him, that he is incapable of anything like affection or kindness."

"Of course he is," replied Miss Gladden quickly, "but I can not conceive of a man being quite so low as to be without even animal instincts; I cannot believe that a father would insult and degrade his own daughter as he has Lyle, and as he would continue to do, if he were not restrained through fear of his wife."

For the first time, Jack started. "Fear of his wife, did you say, Miss Gladden? Pardon me, but I think that brute fears neither God, man nor devil, and how you can assert that he is in fear of his wife, whom he has always abused mercilessly, I cannot imagine."

"It is a fact, nevertheless; for one morning after he had been exceedingly abusive and insulting in his lan-

guage toward Lyle, Mrs. Maverick told her that he was, in some way, in her power, and that it should never occur again; and it never has."

Jack rose, and began to pace the room.

"Did you hear her say that, Miss Gladden?"

"No, Lyle told me of it."

"Had Lyle any idea of what she meant by it?"

"She did not seem to have; nothing was ever said regarding that phase of the subject; she only seemed relieved that Mrs. Maverick promised to prevent a repetition of her father's abuse of her."

Jack seated himself. "You spoke of some reasons on Lyle's part for your conclusions; what were they?"

Miss Gladden then told him of Lyle's strange impressions and of her dream, but made no allusion to the photograph, wishing to reserve that until later.

Jack looked thoughtful. "I wonder that she has never spoken to me regarding this dream," he said at length.

"She told me she had not had the dream so often since having been occupied with her studies and reading, probably that accounts for her not speaking of it; lately she says it has returned."

Both were silent for a while, then Miss Gladden asked:

"Do you not think these dreams and impressions are indications of an early life, far different from this?"

"I do," he replied gravely.

"That was my opinion," then, determined to get some expression from him, she continued:

"I am so attached to her, so desirous, if possible, to rescue her from this wretched life, that I am anxious to get some clue as to her true parentage; that is why I have come to you, her friend. I thought possibly you might be able to aid me in getting some evidence, or some information regarding her early history."

Miss Gladden was watching Jack keenly, to note if her words produced any effect on that immobile face. She was not disappointed: he started, almost imperceptibly, and as he fixed his dark eyes upon her own, she noticed, as never before, how keen and piercing, and how eloquently beautiful they were. Miss Gladden's eyes did not drop before his searching gaze; she was determined



that he should read only sincerity and candor in their depths, and make his answer accordingly. When he spoke, his voice was unlike its usual smooth, even tone; it was tender and deep, full of some strange emotion, and reminded her wonderfully of her lover.

"Miss Gladden, may I ask,—for I believe you will answer me truthfully and candidly,—what ever led you to suppose that I could give you any information regarding Lyle's early history?"

"I will answer you candidly, as you wish," she replied; "the thought first occurred to me of coming to you for advice regarding Lyle, simply because I regarded you as her best friend, in fact, until I came, her only friend. Then a remark accidentally dropped by Lyle, as to what you had once said of her singing, that it reminded you of but one voice which you had heard, but that you did not like to hear her, led me to think that perhaps she was in some way connected with some one you had known, and that possibly that was the reason for the special interest you took in her welfare.

"Then there was something more, in connection with her dream," and she told him how Lyle had at last identified the pictured face which seemed so familiar to her, as the dream-face of her childhood, and how immediately after the dream had returned.

"After she told me this," continued Miss Gladden, "you will see that I naturally concluded that the face was that of her mother; that her mother, her parents, and probably her early life were known to you; and I will frankly admit, that except that it seemed incredible that you would allow her to remain in these surroundings, if my hypothesis were correct, I would have believed that you were her father, and that grief from bereavement or separation, had caused you to choose this life for yourself and her."

Jack had again risen and was slowly pacing the room. Miss Gladden could read no sign of displeasure in his face, though she detected indications of some powerful emotion, and of acute suffering. He seemed battling with old-time memories, and when at last he seated himself and began speaking, there was a strange pathos vibrat-

ing through the forced calmness of his voice, and the piercing eyes, now looking so kindly into her own, had in their depths such hopeless sadness, that Miss Gladden's heart was stirred by a pity deeper than she had ever known, for she instinctively felt that she was in the presence of some great, despairing sorrow.

With a smile of rare sweetness and beauty, he said: "Your candor and frankness deserve confidence in return, and I will give it so far as it is within my power to do so, and yet I fear that you will be disappointed. Your surmises are incorrect in many respects, and yet contain a great deal of truth, and I will try, so far as possible, to be as frank with you as you have been with me. In the first place, I must say to you, that regarding Lyle's true parentage, whether or not she is the child of the Mavericks, I know, positively, nothing more than do you, yourself."

He smiled as he noted Miss Gladden's look of astonishment, and continued:

"Like you, I have my suspicions that she is not their child, and have had them since first seeing her, years ago. As in your case, my suspicions long ago changed to conviction, and my convictions are probably even deeper than yours, for the reason, that in form, in feature, in voice and manner, in every expression and gesture," his voice trembled for an instant, but he controlled it, "she is the exact counterpart of another; some one whom I knew in a life as remote, as far from this as it is possible to conceive. But I have no direct proof, not a shadow of tangible evidence with which I could confront Maverick and denounce him with having stolen the child, and, knowing him as I do, I know that for Lyle's sake, until I have some such proof, it were better to remain silent."

"Pardon me for interrupting you," Miss Gladden exclaimed, "but that is a contingency that never entered my mind, that Lyle had been stolen from her parents! That is far worse than anything I had dreamed of."

"Nevertheless, if she is not their child, she was stolen, and just in proportion as the former is improbable, the latter is probable, almost certain. You will now see wherein your supposition that my interest in her was due

to her connection in my mind with some one I had formerly known, was correct. I took a special interest in her for this reason; it was a pleasure to teach her, to note her mind expanding so rapidly, to watch her as she developed physically and mentally; every day growing more and more like the one I had known. I enjoyed tracing the resemblance day by day, though it often caused me almost as much pain as pleasure,—but when I heard her sing, that was too much,—it was more than I could bear,—it was like compelling some lost soul in purgatory to listen to the songs of paradise.”

There was a tremor in Jack’s voice, and he paused, touched even more deeply by the sympathetic tears glistening in the beautiful eyes full of such tender pity, than by the bitter memories passing before his own mind.

“What has perplexed me most,” he continued, “is the fact that Lyle has seemed unable to recall anything relating to her early childhood. I have tried in every way to arouse her memory, and that was my chief object in allowing her to see the photograph of which she told you; but, as she often says, the first few years of her life seem to be only blank. I cannot account for that.”

“Still,” said Miss Gladden, “these dreams of hers show that there are memories there, and something may yet recall them to her mind.”

“That has been my hope,” he replied, “that is what I have been waiting for all these years, for her mind to recall some incident, or some individual, that would furnish the needed proof as to her parentage.”

“Do you think,” asked Miss Gladden, after a pause, “that it would be wise to give Lyle a hint of our suspicions?”

“I have thought it might be well, if possible, to arouse her own suspicions by some process of reasoning on her part, not by any suggestions of ours.”

“May I inquire whether those whom you consider her true parents are still living?”

“They both died many years ago.”

“Then, if her identity could be proven beyond a doubt, would there be any one to give her such a home as she ought to have?”

"Yes, there are those who would be only too glad to give her such a home as very few have the good fortune to possess."

"And have they never made any inquiry for her?" Miss Gladden asked in surprise.

"They have no idea that she is living; her parents died under peculiar circumstances, and she was supposed to have died at the same time."

"Then ought we not," said Miss Gladden thoughtfully, "both for her sake and theirs, to let them know that she is living, and help them to find her?"

"Unless they could see her for themselves," he replied, "they would probably be rather skeptical, and require very positive proof regarding her claims, they have believed her dead for so many years. But even though I may have known Lyle's mother, I am not in communication with her friends, and would not be the proper person to present her claims to them."

For a few moments, Miss Gladden sat silently watching the play of the light and shade on the mountain side across the ravine, opposite the cabin, as the shadows cast by the light, floating clouds, followed each other in rapid succession.

Jack seemed to be thinking deeply, and when he at last spoke, it was with great deliberation:

"For a long time, as I have become more and more convinced of Lyle's identity, I have been anxious to have her taken away from these surroundings, and placed in the home to which I believe she has a right; but without tangible evidence with which to establish her claims, and also to prove Maverick's guilt, I could think of no feasible plan, nothing that did not seem likely to result in failure, and leave Lyle possibly in a worse condition than at present. I will now say to you, Miss Gladden, in confidence, that I think before very long, the way will be opened for Lyle to find the home and friends that I consider are really hers. Through information given me in confidence, I have learned that some of those whom I believe to be most closely related to her and who would be most interested in her, did they know of her existence, will in all probability be out here on business this sum-

mer; if they do not recognize Lyle, I shall be greatly disappointed."

Miss Gladden's face expressed the delight she felt. "Is it possible?" she exclaimed, "Why, I cannot conceive of anything lovelier! If she has been stolen all these years, and her people unconscious of her very existence, to have them appear on the scene, and recognize and claim her, will seem like a beautiful bit of fiction interwoven in our prosaic, every-day life, or like the closing scene in some drama, where the wrongs at last are all made right. To think what happiness it will bring to them, to her and to us!"

Jack's face grew strangely serious. "I shall be glad for her sake;" he replied, then added: "Sometimes, Miss Gladden, wrongs are righted only at a terrible cost, and what seems to you like the closing of a peaceful drama, may prove a tragedy to those who are concerned in it."

Then, before she could reply, he said, in a different tone, as though to change the conversation:

"It will not be best to mention what I have told you to any one; there is no knowing what course Maverick might pursue if he had a hint of it, for he is a desperate man; but if there is any way in which Lyle's mind could be carried back and made to recall something of her past life, I wish it might be done."

Miss Gladden had risen, preparatory to taking leave. Having given a searching glance around the room, she turned toward Jack, saying wistfully:

"Am I asking too much? Could I see the photograph which you allowed Lyle to see?"

For an instant Jack hesitated; then he replied, "I am willing you should see it, but you must not expect me to say anything concerning that picture or myself. I have spoken to you in confidence regarding Lyle, but I can go no further."

"I will not ask it," she replied.

Without a word, he went to a small trunk, concealed by a fine bear-skin, and taking therefrom the picture, silently handed it to Miss Gladden.

She uttered a low cry of surprise, and then stood for some time intently studying the lovely face in every detail.

When she returned the picture to Jack's hands, there were tears in her eyes, as she exclaimed, "How beautiful! and how like Lyle!"

"I hoped she would see the resemblance," he replied.

"It seems almost incredible that she did not," answered Miss Gladden, "except for the fact that she has the least self-consciousness of any one I ever saw; it is doubtful if she would recognize her own picture."

For a long time Jack stood watching Miss Gladden, as, having thanked him for the interview, she walked slowly up the winding road. His eyes grew strangely wistful and tender, very unlike their ordinary expression, and a smile, sad but sweet, played about the usually stern lips.

"He has chosen well," he murmured at length, "they are well suited to each other; Heaven grant nothing may ever mar their happiness!" and with a heavy sigh, he turned and entered the cabin.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

As Miss Gladden slowly followed the winding canyon road on her return from the little cabin, the thoughts flashing through her mind very strongly resembled the lights and shadows which she had watched chasing each other across the mountain side. While she had gained very little direct information, Jack's theories had strengthened her own convictions, though placing the matter in a slightly different light. She had a very vivid imagination, and looked forward with anticipations of keenest pleasure to the coming of Lyle's friends,—whoever they might be—and their probable recognition of her; and yet she could not forget Jack's words regarding the terrible cost which might be involved, resulting in possible tragedy, and an indefinable dread seemed at times to overshadow all other thoughts, and perplex her. Not dreaming, however, that the words could refer to herself, or those in whom she was most deeply interested, she tried to banish this feeling by planning what course would be best to pursue regarding Lyle, and determined to confide the

whole matter to Houston, and ask his advice. So absorbed was she in her own thoughts and plans, that not until she had nearly approached the house, did she observe the presence of strangers.

A party of eight or ten ladies and gentlemen, including three or four tourists from the east, had come out from Silver City. They had come with wagons, bringing a large tent which was to be put up for those who could not be accommodated in the house. They proved to be very pleasant people, and during the ensuing ten days of their stay, Miss Gladden and Lyle seldom saw each other apart from their guests. There were numerous excursions to various points of interest, moonlight rides on the lake and impromptu dances.

Houston at this time was more than usually occupied, as the day after the arrival of the camping party, Mr. Blaisdell unexpectedly appeared upon the scene. He arrived quite early in the morning, having been brought by special train from the Y. He found Houston alone in the office, and greeted him with a cordiality quite surprising to the latter, considering his taciturn, dissatisfied manner when at the mines a few days before. He seemed in no hurry to leave the office, but remained talking for some time concerning business affairs at Silver City.

"I may want you to run over there, just for a day, while I'm here," he said at length, "for I expect to remain out here for about a week. By the way, Houston, I hear you pitched into old Hartwell one night, over there at the hotel, for some remarks he made about the company."

"Ah," said Houston, "how did you hear of that?"

"There was a friend of mine there, who overheard Hartwell's talk, and afterward saw you go up and speak to him. Having seen you in our office, he had a little curiosity as to what was going on. He said Hartwell cursed you up hill and down, but that you were so damned cool the old fellow couldn't rattle you. Hartwell told him afterward that you threatened to compel him to substantiate all he had said, and he was glad that the old fellow, for once, found somebody that wasn't afraid of him."

"Oh, no," said Houston, quietly, "I didn't see any reason for being afraid."

"Well," said Mr. Blaisdell, "I liked your spirit all right, but then, men like Hartwell are not worth paying any attention to. He is interested in another company, so of course he tries to run down ours, and he has a certain clique that he has persuaded to think just as he does. I never think it best to notice any of his remarks."

"If he had simply made a few remarks," said Houston in reply, "I would of course have let them remain unnoticed, but he had continued his harangue for nearly an hour before I spoke to him, so I thought it as well to have a word with him myself."

"Oh, that was all right, perfectly right on your part, only I have adopted the policy of letting barking dogs alone."

After a little further conversation, Mr. Blaisdell looked over the books, and finding everything in satisfactory shape, remarked:

"You seem to have familiarized yourself very thoroughly with the work so far as you have gone, and in a very short time. You will doubtless remember, Mr. Houston, that when we engaged you, you were told that we should probably need your services later at the mines, in assisting the general superintendent. Morgan's work is increasing lately, and I have been thinking that I would much prefer to have a trustworthy person like yourself, assist him, even if we have to employ another bookkeeper, than to put on an entirely new man at the mines. I am going out to the mines this afternoon, to see how Morgan is getting along, and I think that to-morrow we will close the office, and you had better go out with me, and I will show you the work that I wish you to have charge of there. It probably will not take all your time, you will still be in the office more or less, at least enough to superintend the work in case I bring out a new man. He will simply work under your direction and supervision, the responsibility will all devolve upon you."

For the next day or two, Houston's time was spent at the mines, familiarizing himself with the underground workings, and becoming acquainted with the different



classes and grades of ore, and the various methods of mining and reducing the same.

This was just the opportunity for which Houston had been waiting, and he entered upon his new work with a zest and enthusiasm that delighted Mr. Blaisdell, and even won the esteem of Morgan. On the second day, to Houston's great joy, he was given charge, under Morgan, of what was known as the "Yankee" group of mines, containing the Yankee Boy, the Yankee Girl and the Puritan, the three most valuable mines in which the New York company was interested.

In passing through one of these mines, Houston noticed two miners working together with wonderful precision and accuracy, and on looking at them closely, recognized in one of them, the man whom Rutherford had pointed out to him on the train from Valley City, and of whom he had heard Miss Gladden speak as Lyle's friend. The man seemed to pay little attention to his being there, and on coming out, Houston inquired of Mr. Blaisdell concerning him.

"I can tell you nothing about him," replied Mr. Blaisdell, "except that he and his partner, the Irishman, are the two most expert miners we have. They live by themselves, and refuse to mingle with the other men, consequently they are not very popular among the miners, but of course that cuts no figure with us, so long as they are skilled workmen."

The next day, Houston went to Silver City, on business for Mr. Blaisdell, and while there, sent the following message over the wires, to Van Dorn:

"Everything in readiness; bring machinery at once."

Upon his return to the mining camp to enter upon his new duties, Houston resolved to make a careful study of the men working under him, both foremen and miners, for the purpose of determining whether there were among them any whom he could trust sufficiently to seek from them whatever assistance might be necessary for himself and Van Dorn in their future work.

Accordingly, for the first few days, he spent considerable time in the mines, apparently examining the workings,

but in reality watching the men themselves. Among some of them he saw black looks and scowls, and heard muttered comments regarding himself: "Git onto the dude!" "D'ye see the tenderfoot?" "Thinks he's goin' to boss us, does he? we'll show him a trick or two." These were mainly from Maverick's consorts, and men of their ilk, ignorant and brutal. Houston paid no attention to their remarks or frowns, but continued his rounds among them, conscious that he was master of the situation, meanwhile giving instructions to the foreman who accompanied him. As he passed and repassed Jack and Mike, working together with almost the automatic precision of machinery, he stopped to watch them, attracted partly by admiration for their work, and partly by a slight interest in the man who had been his fellow passenger, and concerning whom he had heard such various reports.

During the slight pause in their work, the Irishman eyed him curiously, with indications of his native drollery and humor betraying themselves in his mirthful face; he seemed about to speak, but Jack, with set, stern features, was ready, and the work continued without a word. In that brief interim, however, Jack had fixed one of his keen, piercing glances upon Houston, which the latter returned with one equally searching, and though not a muscle relaxed in that immobile face, covered with dust and grime, yet a strange thrill of mutual sympathy quivered and vibrated through the soul of each man, and Houston knew that he had found a friend.

"There is a man among a thousand," he thought as he walked away, "a man of honor, in whom one could place unbounded confidence; no wonder Lyle has found him such a friend!"

At the next pause in their work, Mike's feelings found expression:

"Begorra! but the young mon is progressin' foinely, to be put over the loikes of us, and bein' as how most loikely he niver sit foot in a moine, till comin' out into this counthry!"

Jack's face had grown strangely set and white: "We are to be his friends, remember that, Mike," he said, in a voice unnaturally stern.

"Frinds!" exclaimed the astonished Mike, "Bedad! and whin did I iver know ye to make frinds with ony of owld Blaisdell's men befoor?"

"Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, Mike," was Jack's only reply as he again began work, and Mike had nothing to do but to follow his example.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

In a short time Houston had become perfectly familiar with his new surroundings. He was thoroughly at home in the underground workings, readily finding his way in the labyrinth of shafts, tunnels and cross-cuts extending for miles in all directions, and connecting the various mining claims one with another.

He knew the name and face of nearly every man employed in the various shifts, and by his keen perception and insight, was able to form a very correct estimate of their character and standing in that little community. Though no words had been exchanged between himself and Jack beyond those of the most commonplace greetings, yet his respect for the man, and confidence in him, increased with each day, and was plainly indicated by his manner toward him whenever they met.

As he watched the men, in his frequent rounds through the mines, most of their faces were to him as an open book, on some of whose pages he read histories of misfortune and loss, or crime and shame in the past, and on others, of eager ambitions and bright hopes for the future. There were men with gray hair and bowed forms, whose dull eyes and listless step told of hopeless, irretrievable loss; men of intelligence and ability whose recklessness or whose despondency told of some living sorrow, worse than death; there were some whose stealthy, shrinking gait and watchful, suspicious glance bespoke some crime, unknown to their fellows, but which to themselves seemed ever present, suspended, like the sword of Damocles, above their heads.

But even to Houston, Jack remained a mystery, and as he noted the powerful, athletic form, the profile of pa-

trician beauty, perfect as though chiseled in marble, the hair and beard black and glossy as the raven's wing, though touched with silver here and there, he found himself unable to read the history of that life.

"There is a man," he soliloquized, "my equal, if not my superior, in birth, in education, in intellectual ability; how came he here? What has wrecked his life?"

But the dark, piercing eyes, turned on him for an instant, gave no answer to his query.

As he and Morgan, their day's work completed, were returning to the house, Houston made some inquiries regarding the men, and from the information given by Morgan concerning some of them, found his own judgment of them correct.

"And who is the man called 'Jack,' who works with the Irishman?"

"Heaven knows, I don't, nor nobody else," replied Morgan; "he came here about six or seven years ago, I guess, at least; he was here when I came, and was considered an expert then. He never would have anything to say to the other men, and always lived by himself till the Irishman came; he was another queer sort of duck and was a first-class miner, too, so him and Jack has worked together and lived together ever since, but Jack is boss."

"Are they the only miners living by themselves?" asked Houston.

"The only single men; there's six or seven of 'em that are married and have families, like Maverick; they have very good shacks, furnished by the company, but all the single men, excepting them two, live at the quarters. By the way, have you ever been down to the quarters?"

"No," replied Houston, "but I should like very well to visit them."

"All right, we'll go to-night if you like; I go down there myself once in a while and listen to their stories; they've most of 'em had some queer experiences, and they can spin as many yarns as a lot of sailors, any time."

Later in the evening, Houston, having excused himself to the ladies in general, and Miss Gladden in particular, accompanied by Morgan, was on his way to the min-

ers' quarters. The latter were situated but a short distance from the office, on the road to the mines, and consisted of two boarding houses and four bunk houses. Farther down the road were the stables for the horses used in hauling supplies; also blacksmith and carpenter shops, and a storehouse.

A rather novel scene presented itself to Houston as he approached. Scattered about on the ground, and loafing in the door-ways in all attitudes and positions, were over a hundred men, of various ages, classes and nationalities, but principally Cornishmen, or, in western vernacular, "Cousin Jacks." Many of them were strangers to him, being employed in other mines than those with which he was familiar, but among them were many of his own men. From the door-way of one of the bunk houses came the strains of a violin, while in another, a concertina shrieked and groaned, and from all directions came the sound of ribald songs, coarse jests and boisterous laughter. Here and there were groups of men engaged in playing poker or seven-up, where little piles of silver and gold were rapidly changing hands, to the accompaniment of muttered oaths. At one side, Maverick and a few kindred spirits seemed trying to outrival one another in profanity and obscenity, while at some distance from them, was a large company of the better class of men, some lounging against trees and rocks, some sitting or lying at full length on the ground, but all listening with unmistakable interest, to a man, gray and grizzled, with a weather-beaten but kindly face, who evidently was entertaining the crowd with tales of his own early life.

As Houston and Morgan approached, the speaker stopped; some of the men half rose from their recumbent positions out of respect for the "new boss," and all eyed him rather curiously, though not unkindly. Houston recognized many of his own men among them, and greeted them with a pleasant "Good evening, boys."

"Hullo, Billy," said Morgan, addressing the old miner, "what do you know to-night?" then noting that he was watching Houston with a half smile on his rugged face, he added, "Thought I'd bring the boss down to see you and the rest of the boys to-night."

"Good evenin' boss," responded the old fellow, while a merry smile twinkled in his eyes, "I expect this is your first visit to a reg'lar, genuwine minin' camp?"

"My first, perhaps, but not my last," said Houston, with a winning smile.

"That's right," said the old man approvingly, as he proceeded to refill his pipe; "I've been a watchin' you, off and on, down there at the mines, bein' as I'd heerd you was a tenderfoot, and I must say you've took a holt as if you was an old hand at the job."

"Oh, yes," Houston replied, "with a little determination, a person can pick up anything of that kind easily. I think, with a little practice, I could make a pretty successful miner; it would require grit and stick-to-it-iveness, that's all."

"Grit and stick-to-it-iveness, that's good," said the old miner, highly pleased, "well, you seem to have plenty of 'em both, and plenty of good muscle, too," with an admiring glance at Houston's fine, athletic form.

"See here, Billy," said Houston pleasantly, after chatting a few moments, "when we came, it looked very much as though you were telling stories to the crowd here, and the boys all seemed very much interested; now we want you to go on with your story, we would enjoy it as much as the rest."

"Let me see," said Billy, "I don't remember just where I was, but I guess I'd finished as you come up."

"Never mind, you can start another," said Houston.

"Yes, Billy, give us another," chimed in the boys.

"Go ahead, pardner," added Morgan, "spin us a yarn, that's what we came for."

"I was only tellin' the boys about the old days when I came out to the mines, and for the first few years after," Billy began.

"Those must have been interesting times," said Houston.

"Int'restin'? I should say so! You fellows don't know nothin' about minin' compared to them days; I tell you, things was lively then. I was there at Leadville when it was opened up, and you couldn't get anybody to look at you without payin' 'em a good, round sum for it; couldn't

get a place to roll yourself in your blanket and lie on the floor short of five or ten dollars; folks bought dry goods boxes and lived in 'em. Then I was down here when they opened up the Big Bonanza mine, in Diamond gulch, not far from Silver City. I tell you boys, them was high old times, everything was scarce and prices was high,—flour was a hundred dollars a sack, and potatoes seventy-five dollars a bushel,—but money was plenty,—or gold dust,—we didn't have no money, everything was paid for in gold dust. 'Twas pretty tough in them days, too, everybody went armed to the teeth, and guns and knives was used pretty free."

"Was that in the days of the vigilantes?" asked Houston.

"Yes, they come along soon after, they had to. There was desperate characters here, but the vigilantes made short work of 'em, they didn't even give 'em time to say their prayers. I tell you, the gambling houses and the dance halls, and all them places was lively in them days. There wasn't many words over a game, if any quarrels come up, they was settled pretty quick with the revolver or bowie knife."

"There must have been some high stakes played in those days," Houston remarked.

"High? well, yes, rather; I've seen men sit down to a game worth anywhere from fifty to two or three hundred thousand, and get up without a cent in the world."

The old man paused to relight his pipe, and having puffed reflectively for a few moments, settled himself with the air of a man who has a long story to tell, and the surrounding miners evidently so understood it, for they shifted their positions accordingly, and prepared to listen.

"Speakin' of gamblin'," he began, "puts me in mind of something that happened among the camps on the other side of the range, nigh onto fifteen years ago. A gang of us boys was in Dandy Jim's gambling hall one night. The place was crowded, I remember, and we was all tryin' to make our fortunes on the high card. Some of us was dead broke, but them that hadn't the stuff borrowed from them that had, sure of better luck next time. They was all so deep in the game that none of 'em noticed a

seedy-lookin' chap who come in, kinder quiet like, and set down to the faro table and began to play. I guess I was the only one who noticed him, and at first, I couldn't make him out, but after a bit, I remembered him as 'Un-lucky Pete.' That man had a history. When I first saw him, some eight or ten years before that night, he had just come west with his wife, a pretty little woman, and had a good team of horses and a new wagon. He was a reg'lar border character, and whenever a new country was opened up for settlement, him and his wife was the first on the ground, ready to make a-run to secure a home. Pete was prosperous, till one night, in a quarrel over a game of cards, he killed his man, and from that time his luck changed. He secured one or two good claims, but lost title to them; he lost his horses, and as fast as he bought other horses, they died or was stolen, and everything went against him. He wandered from one country to another, but bad luck met him at every turn. The last I seen him was some two years before; then him and his wife and two or three babies was goin' over the country in an old, broken-down wagon. The wheels was held together with wire and ropes, and the canvas top was in rags and tatters; the horses was the poorest, skinniest creatures you ever see, and him and his wife looked off the same piece.

"Well, somehow or 'nuther, I knew him that night, though he looked harder than ever, and had an old slouched hat down over his face. He looked like a man that was pushed pretty clost to the wall, and had got down to his last nickél. Well, he set down there to the table, and threw a silver dollar on the high card; then pulled that old hat down clean over his eyes, and never spoke, or looked one way or another. The high card won, and the dealer paid the bet, and pushed the money over to Pete, but he never stirred.

"Well, that high card kep' a winnin' till there was a big pile of money there, but Pete, he never stirred, no more'n a stone. The dealer, he got mad and begun to swear, but Pete didn't move.

"'Somebody wake that fool up,' says he, with an oath.

"A fellow sittin' next to Pete shook him, and then tore



off his hat. Well, boys, I'll never forget that sight, it makes me sort o' shiver now, when I think of it; there set a dead man at the table before that pile of gold.

"The dealer started to rake in that pile o' money, but about a dozen revolvers was p'inted at him, and he decided not to be in too big a hurry about it.

" 'What's the use anyway?' says he, 'the man's dead and the money's no good for him, and besides, nobody knows who he is.'

" 'I do,' says I, jumpin' up.

" 'And I,' says another fellow, 'the man just come into camp a day or two ago, and his family's starvin'.'

"Well, we bundled that money up pretty sudden, and a half a dozen of us started to find the folks; we found 'em, too, but the wife was dead, starved to death, and the children wouldn't have lasted much longer. The oldest, a girl about eight years old, told that they had nothin' to eat for two days, and her father found the dollar, and started down to the store for food, but soon after he left the cabin, the mother died.

"We buried Pete and his wife in one grave, and then with the pile of money we got good homes for the children, and some of it was to be used in givin' 'em a good eddication, and the last I heerd, they was comin' on well. But I've never set down to a game sence, that I haven't thought of the night I played faro, with a dead man at the table."

At the conclusion of the old miner's story, a little suppressed thrill of excitement ran through his audience. Morgan, who had seemed restless and ill at ease, rose to go, and Houston, finding it much later than he supposed, after a few pleasant words with the boys, bade them good night, and hastened after Morgan, who was already sauntering up the road a little way in advance.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"Well," said Morgan, as Houston overtook him, "what do you think of a 'genuwine minin' camp,' as Billy calls it?"

"The quarters are much more extensive than I supposed," replied Houston, "I never realized before that there were so many men employed here; some of them are good fellows, too, I enjoyed my visit to-night immensely."

"I generally like to come down and listen to them once in a while," said Morgan, "but somehow, I didn't care to stay there to-night, that story of Billy's made me feel sort of creepy; I'm feeling a little off to-night, anyway."

"That was a strange story the old fellow told, almost bordering on the improbable, it seemed to me, but I suppose there are a great many strange occurrences in a country like this."

"Yes, lots of things happen here, and folks think nothing of 'em, that would be considered improbable anywhere back east."

"Are you from the east?" inquired Houston.

"Yes, part way," said Morgan, "not from way back, though, I've never been farther east than Ohio. I was born in Missouri, and raised in northern Iowa."

He was silent for a moment, then continued: "I believe I told you one day that sometime I'd give you a bit of my life; I guess now's as good as any time, and when you've heard it, maybe you won't wonder at some of my views."

"As I said, I was born in Missouri; when I was about three years old, my folks moved to Iowa. I can just remember my father being with us at that time, but I never saw him after I was three and a half or so, and when I got old enough to think about it and ask for him, mother told me he was dead, and I never knew anything different till years after. We were always moving, I remem-

ber, from one place to another, and though we never had any money saved up, yet we lived well and never wanted for anything. Mother used to have a good deal of company, and be away from home considerable, but she was always kind to me, and I was a soft, warm-hearted, little chap in those days, and I know I thought the world of her.

"We lived together till I was about ten years old, and then times began to get pretty close; mother didn't have any money, and we had to pinch to get along, but she was always good to me.

"Finally she decided to go to Denver; said she had heard of an opening there for her to run a boarding house and make money, but she didn't want to take me with her, and sent me to a brother of hers, living in Ohio. That was the end of all happiness for me. He was a man old enough to be my grandfather, for mother was the youngest of a large family. He and his wife lived by themselves, for they had no children, and a meaner, stingier old couple never lived. Mother wrote pretty often at first, and always sent money, but don't you think I ever got any of it. They never mentioned my mother to me, and they wouldn't let me speak of her.

"Well, things went on from bad to worse, and finally, when I was fourteen, I run away. I stole rides on freight cars when I could, and when I couldn't do that, I tramped, till I got to St. Louis, and got a place there in a third-class hotel as bell boy. While I was there, I picked up a good many little accomplishments that have stuck to me ever since, gambling and swearing, and so on. I got to be pretty tough, I know, but in spite of it all, there was one good spot about me yet,—I thought the world of my mother. I staid in St. Louis two years; in that time I had only heard from mother twice, but she sent me money both times, and wrote me kind letters, though she never said anything about my coming to see her."

By this time, they had reached the main road, and as Morgan seated himself on a rock to finish his story, Houston followed his example.

"I made up my mind I wanted to see her, so I took

what little money I had saved up, about eighty dollars, and started for Denver. The last letter I had from mother, she said she was running a house on a certain street, and I supposed of course it was a boarding house. I won't tell you her real name; Morgan wasn't her name, nor mine neither, I took it afterwards, but I'll call her name Johnson. I got to Denver, and happened to meet an old acquaintance of mine named Tim, who took me to a fifth-class boarding and lodging house where he was staying. Tim had only been in Denver a few days, and knew very little of the city, but we found a crowd of old-timers at the house, and after a while I asked for Mrs. Johnson who kept a boarding house on such a street. The men all laughed and began to guy me; I got hot and was going to sail into them, but Tim persuaded me to go out with him, and we started in to paint the town.

"Well, we'd been out about two or three hours, when we came to a dancing hall, the toughest we'd seen,—a regular dive,—and we went in, bound to have some fun. The place was full of tough-looking subs, and a lot of frouzy, dowdy girls, and what they lacked in good looks they made up in paint and brass,—such brazen faces I never saw. Half way down the hall was a big, fat woman, with her hair blondined, who seemed to have charge of the place, and was giving orders to the man behind the bar. They had some loud talk, and something in her voice took my attention, and I looked at her; just then she turned 'round facing me, and great God! it was my mother! I knew her in spite of the blond hair and the paint, and she knew me. She gave one awful shriek, and then fell in a dead faint, and when she came to half an hour after, she went into hysterics, and screamed and raved and cried nearly all night.

"I was so dazed, everything was going round and round, and I thought the world was coming to an end; and it would have been better for me if it had. The next day, she was able to see me, and I went to her room, and I guess I must have staid three or four hours. She told me then, that her husband was living, but that he quit her back in Iowa, and that he claimed I was not his child. She cried and begged me to stay with her, but I left her

that day. That was fifteen years ago, and I have never seen her since. From that time, the last tie that bound me to even a belief in anything good was gone. I took a different name, and came up here in this part of the country. Once I found a girl I liked, but just as I began to think something of her, I found she was like all the rest of 'em. I've no faith in man or woman, and don't believe there is any such thing as honor or virtue. If there are some people who seem virtuous and honorable, it is simply either because they have been so placed that there was no temptation to be anything else, or because they have succeeded in keeping up appearances a little better than other folks."

As Morgan paused, Houston spoke very slowly and kindly:

"Your experience has certainly been a sad one, Morgan, and I am truly sorry for you; sorry most of all that it has produced such an effect on you."

"Well," said Morgan, "I guess it don't make much difference, one way or another, what we think or what we do."

"Your mother's opinions and actions seem to have made considerable difference in your life," answered Houston, quietly.

"Yes, by George! I should say so!" replied Morgan, gloomily.

"Perhaps your opinions and your conduct are wrecking some other life, in like manner. There is not one of us who does not exert a powerful influence on those about us, one way or the other, to build up and strengthen, or to wreck and destroy."

As there was no reply, Houston said: "I am very glad you have given me this sketch of your life, Morgan, I shall always feel differently toward you, remembering this."

"Yes," said Morgan, rising, "I wanted you to know, and I thought this was as good a time as I would have. You will remember it, whatever happens," he added ambiguously, as he started slowly down the road, in an opposite direction from the house.

"Which way are you going?" asked Houston, also rising.

"Down to the Y."

"What! are you going that distance as late as this?"

"Yes," replied Morgan, "I don't go all the way by the road; there's a cut across that makes it a good deal shorter, and I'll have plenty of time."

They both stood a few moments watching a tall, dark figure that had been pacing up and down the road all the time they had been talking, sometimes approaching quite near, then retreating out of sight. They both recognized it as Jack.

"He's a queer duck," muttered Morgan, "wonder what he's doing, this is rather late for a constitutional;" then added, "I wish I had some of the money that chap's got."

"Why, has he money?" inquired Houston.

"He must have," was the reply, "he never spends anything, just hoards it up; he's got enough any way to help me out just now, if I could only have it."

"Are you in need of money?" asked Houston, quickly, "if so, I will gladly accommodate you."

"Much obliged," replied Morgan, starting down the road, "but I can get along for the present. Luck has been against me a little lately, but I guess it will turn all right," adding, as he looked back over his shoulder, "if it don't turn too late, like 'Unlucky Pete'."

As Houston walked rapidly up the canyon toward the house, he saw Jack again approaching, and glad of an opportunity to meet this man toward whom he felt such a powerful attraction, he slackened his pace as Jack came up, and greeting him cordially, stopped and entered into conversation with him. To his surprise, he found Jack's manner far less reserved than on the few occasions when they had met in the mine. He seemed as ready to stop as Houston himself, and though he spoke with a dignity of tone and manner utterly unlike an employe, the icy reserve was gone, and in its place, there was in his voice the genuine ring of friendliness.

After a few moments of ordinary conversation, Jack remarked:

"You are not often out in this locality at this hour, and alone."

"No," Houston replied, "but I have been visiting the miners in company with Morgan, and remained there later than I intended. Then a talk with Morgan out there among the rocks delayed me still longer."

"Pardon me," said Jack, "but I suppose you are aware that you have enemies here."

"Yes," said Houston, slightly surprised, "I am conscious of that fact."

"And," continued Jack, lowering his tone, "you are probably also aware that this enmity is likely to increase, so that unless you exercise great caution, your life will be in danger?"

Houston was startled, not so much by the suggestion of personal danger, as by the thought that this man seemed to understand something of his position there. Was it possible his secret was known? It could not be, but if it were,—his nerves quivered, not with fear for himself, but with apprehension lest his whole scheme should in some way prove a failure.

These thoughts flashed through his mind with the speed of lightning, but Jack was quick to read them, and before Houston could make any reply, he continued:

"I desire to have a private interview with you, as early as possible, and as we will wish to be perfectly secure from interruption, as well as from all danger of being overheard, I wish you would come to my cabin, there we can talk with perfect safety. And now, as a key to this contemplated interview, allow me to say that I fully understand your mission here; but have no fear, your secret is absolutely safe. My only reason for wishing to meet you is, that I desire to aid you if you will permit me. Will you fix an evening for this conference of ours?"

"Certainly," said Houston cordially, his momentary surprise giving way to the confidence which he had felt in this man, since first meeting him, face to face.

An engagement was made for the near future, and with a cordial hand-clasp, the two men parted.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

The next evening, as Houston stood for a few moments in the little porch, watching a game of lawn tennis which had been hastily improvised by the merry crowd, Lyle suddenly left the group of players and joined him. Looking at him rather archly, she asked:

"Do you expect to remain out as late to-night as you did last night?"

"I don't know just how late I may be detained," he answered, smiling, "Why? are you keeping a watchful eye upon me?"

"Certainly," she replied, "Mr. Rutherford used to call himself your guardian, and now that he is gone, I must make his place good;" then she added more seriously, "This is an altogether different country from what you have been accustomed to; it is not particularly pleasant or safe for one to keep late hours here, especially if he has enemies."

Houston was somewhat surprised by this second warning, but he answered lightly:

"Yes, I know I am in what Ned used to call 'the camp of the Philistines,' but you do not think I have any dangerous enemies, do you?"

"It is only fear of detection that keeps some of them from being dangerous," said Lyle, who saw Miss Gladden approaching, "don't give them any opportunities for working their spite in the dark."

Miss Gladden just then came up, and Lyle soon resumed her place among the players.

"Going out again this evening, Mr. Houston?"

"Yes, Miss Gladden," replied Houston with mock gravity.

"Excuse me, Everard," she answered, blushing, "but when so many strangers are about, I am obliged to be very circumspect, you know."

"There are no strangers within hearing at present. Les-



lie," he replied, "but isn't it nearly time for this crowd to take its departure?"

"Yes, they expect to leave to-morrow."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Houston devoutly.

Miss Gladden laughed merrily.

"Well," he continued rather savagely, "I hope, after they are gone, we can enjoy our evenings again as we used to. For the last ten days, I have scarcely had an opportunity for a word with you, unless we deliberately gave the whole company the cold shoulder, which, of course, would not answer."

"And so," said Miss Gladden laughing, "you wreak your revenge upon poor me these last two evenings, by taking yourself away, where I cannot even have the satisfaction of seeing you, while I talk to somebody else."

Houston smiled; "I am obliged to go out this evening, Leslie, I have an engagement to-night, with Jack, at his cabin."

"With Jack!" exclaimed Miss Gladden. "then you have made his acquaintance!"

"No, I can scarcely say that, for I never exchanged a half dozen words with him before last evening. This interview to-night is wholly on business."

"Well," said Miss Gladden, who saw the players beckoning to her, "I am glad you are going to meet him. I saw him the other day, and had a talk with him regarding Lyle, and I wanted to tell you about it, but have had no opportunity. I think you will find him one of the most perfect gentlemen you ever met," and with a little farewell wave of the hand, she left him to rejoin the players who were waiting for her.

Half an hour later, Houston found himself in the inner room of the little cabin, alone with Jack, while at the outside door, Rex was stationed as guard.

Already the twilight was beginning to gather in the little room, but even in its soft, shadowy light, Houston noted the evidences, existing on all sides, of a refined nature, a nature keenly appreciative of beauty in all its forms.

"I hope," said Jack, seating himself near his guest, "that you will excuse the gathering darkness; I thought

it more prudent not to have a light, as it might attract attention, I am in the habit of sitting so much in the twilight, myself."

"A light is not necessary," Houston replied, "the twilight is very pleasant, and the moon will be up presently, and will afford us all the light we need."

There was a moment or two of silence, while Houston waited for his companion to broach the subject of the evening. He was anxious to ascertain how much regarding himself and his errand there in the camp, Jack really knew, and more particularly, to learn, if possible, how he had become possessed of his knowledge.

Jack, on his part, was wondering whether, with their brief acquaintance, he could give Houston any assurance that the latter would consider sufficient to warrant taking himself into full confidence concerning his work and plans, so that he could render the assistance he desired.

"You were doubtless somewhat surprised," he began very deliberately and slowly, "by my request, last evening, for this interview."

"Yes," replied the other, "I will admit that I was surprised, more especially by the reason which you gave for your request,—that you understood my position here, and desired to help me."

"Did it never occur to you that, to a person with any degree of penetration, any ability at reading a man's character and habits of life, your position here, as clerk for a disreputable mining company, would, of itself, seem an anomaly, and be liable to excite the suspicion that you had some ulterior object in view?"

"I think," said Houston, with a smile, "you are supposing a person with keener perceptions than are possessed by many in this locality."

"They nearly all possess them to a certain degree, in a latent, uncultivated form, perhaps, but still there. For example, what is the true secret of Maverick's hatred toward you, of Haight's enmity, except that they recognize by a sort of instinct that you belong to an altogether different sphere from that in which they move? They cannot reason it out perhaps, but they feel it;—your language, your conduct, your manner, the very cut of your

clothes, though but a plain business suit, proclaim to one who can read, and reason from these things correctly, and deduct their results therefrom, that you are a man of the highest culture and refinement, of high moral character, and of wealth. Consequently, the question arises, 'what are you doing here?'"

"Pardon me, I do not intend to be personal in my remarks," replied Houston, "but in my opinion, only a person who has himself moved in the highest circles of life would be able to reason in this manner."

"Possibly," said Jack, "they would be better able to classify you, as it were, and assign you to your true position, but these others feel keenly that you are not of their world, but they are generally incapable of drawing any conclusions from their observations, as very few of them have the reasoning faculty, and hence, they would not be likely to question your object or motive in holding this position. My design, however, in thus calling your attention to these facts, is simply to show you that you need not be greatly surprised when I say that from your first coming here, I have felt that you were no ordinary employe; that you were merely holding this position temporarily, either in your own interests, or in the interests of some one else,—but not in the interests of the mining company. Notwithstanding the fact that I live a very secluded life, I yet have means of ascertaining nearly all that is going on around me, and I will say to you truthfully, that I learned the secret of your mission here without even asking a question."

"I can scarcely undersand," said Houston, "how you came to be the recipient of this secret, since you do not mingle with others, and apparently take very little interest in their affairs,"

"Perhaps," said Jack, in low, musical tones, "you would be able to understand the situation better, did you know that your secret was told me by a friend of yours, who believed that, through my very isolation and loneliness, I could the better assist you."

"A friend of mine!" exclaimed Houston, in surprise, "Is it possible that my eastern friends are known to you, and that some one of them has written you?"

"No one has written me, the story was told me by a friend of yours here."

Instantly there flashed into Houston's mind the memory of Lyle's warning, and also of Miss Gladden's declaration that she had seen and talked with Jack, but how could his true position be known to either of them?

"I have but two friends here, at present," was his reply, "and they are women."

"True women are the truest friends," said Jack tersely.

"But how can either of them know anything regarding my work here?"

"I will tell you," and very briefly Jack gave Houston an account of how his plans had first become known to Lyle, and of her subsequent interview with himself, begging his assistance in Houston's behalf.

Houston was inexpressibly astonished and touched to find that the beautiful girl, whom he had considered friendless and helpless, and whom he had defended through a sense of chivalry, had, in return, served him so nobly and so opportunely. He resolved to see her and express to her his appreciation of what she had done, as early as possible.

"I think," said Jack, in conclusion, "you will admit that by this means I have obtained a thorough understanding of what you wish to accomplish."

"You understand it perfectly," Houston answered.

"You will also admit that, after the years of experience that I have had in these particular mines, I must be thoroughly conversant with affairs in connection therewith, and could probably render you just the assistance you will need."

"Most certainly you could," responded Houston quickly, "I know of no one in the entire camp who could assist us so well as you."

"Then," said Jack, "the next and only consideration is, whether you have that degree of confidence in me, that you would feel warranted in trusting me implicitly,—"

"Enough said," said Houston, interrupting him hastily but cordially, "I have that confidence in you, that, even if you had not sought this interview, sooner or later, I would have come to you for assistance."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jack, in surprise, "may I ask why?"

Houston hesitated a moment, and then replied:

"I believe, though we have met so recently, we may speak together as friends, or as brothers; you spoke a while ago of the faculty of perception; please credit me with possessing it in some degree myself, and while I do not wish to be personal or intrusive in my remarks, I am sure you will allow me to say, that if there is any degree of incongruity between my appearance and the position I hold, it certainly exists in a much greater degree in your own case. I, of course, know nothing of your past life; I wish to know nothing of it, except so far as you yourself would tell me, should you ever choose to do so, but this much I do know, and have known from the first, that you are vastly superior to your surroundings here. You claim,—and you are correct,—that I have had the advantages of excellent birth and breeding, of culture and wealth, but you are not one whit behind me in any of these things. Added to all this is the experience which you have accumulated in these late years, in this particular branch of work; surely it was not strange that I felt your acquaintance would be invaluable, could I but secure your friendship sufficiently for you to be interested in my plans."

The moon had risen, flooding the little room with a soft, pale light, but Jack was sitting in the shadow, and Houston could not see the effect produced by his words. He wondered a little that Jack made no response, and, after waiting in silence for a moment or two, continued:

"There is one other consideration which you have not mentioned, and which must not be omitted, and that is compensation."

A sudden movement on Jack's part caused Houston to pause for an instant, but nothing was said, and he proceeded:

"I could not think of asking you to share the difficulties and dangers of this work without abundant compensation. Mr. Cameron, my uncle, who is interested—"

"Stop!" said Jack, putting up one hand as if to ward

off a blow; his voice was hoarse, almost stern, and vibrated with some strange, deep emotion; "If you ever speak to me again of compensation, I will utterly refuse to help you in any way."

"I beg your pardon," said Houston, in a low, gentle tone, "I intended no offense, and I shall certainly respect your wishes."

"There was no offense," replied Jack, more calmly, "but you spoke a few moments since of friendship; that word, to a man living the life I have lived, means volumes; whatever I do, let it be done for friendship's sake."

"So let it be!" responded Houston solemnly, strangely moved by Jack's manner.

For a long time they talked of the work before them, and Houston spoke of the expected arrival of Van Dorn within the next day or two, who was to remain until the end.

"The end is not far distant," said Jack, "for after his coming I can give you nearly all the additional proof needed," and he then proceeded to give information concerning matters of which Houston had not, as yet, obtained even a clue. An arrangement was made whereby Houston and Van Dorn, after the arrival of the latter, were to meet Jack at the cabin, and perfect their plans for the brief campaign before them.

At last, as Houston rose to take his leave, he said: "I hope you will pardon the remark, but while I have not the least doubt of your friendship toward me in this, I cannot overcome the impression that you also have some personal interest in this matter."

"Possibly," replied Jack, gravely, still standing in the shadow as Houston stepped forth into the moon-light, "but not in the way in which you think."

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

The camping party had returned to Silver City, and the old house among the mountains slowly subsided into its former quiet. Lyle's time had been so occupied by the

numerous demands made upon her by the departing guests, that Houston had found no opportunity for speaking with her, as he had planned the previous evening.

When the day's work was completed, he, with Miss Gladden and Lyle, sat in the little porch, watching a brief but furious mountain storm, which had suddenly sprung up, preventing them from taking their customary evening stroll.

To the ordinary beauty of the scene around them was added the grandeur of the tempest, forming a spectacle not easily forgotten. Around the summits of the lofty peaks the fierce lightnings were playing, sometimes darting back and forth like the swords of mighty giants, flashing in mortal combat; sometimes descending swiftly in fiery chains, then seeming to wrap the whole universe in sheets of flame; while the crash and roll of the thunder echoed and re-echoed from peak to peak, the lingering reverberations still muttering and rumbling in the distance, as the fierce cannonading was again renewed. The wind rushed, roaring and shrieking, down the canyon, while the rain fell in gusty, fitful torrents.

At the end of half an hour, only a few stray drops were falling, the sun suddenly burst forth in a flood of golden light, and against the dark background of the storm-cloud, a rainbow spanned the eastern horizon, its glorious tints seeming almost to rival the gorgeous colors of the western sky.

Soon after the storm had passed, Haight was seen approaching the house. As he came up, he handed a telegraphic dispatch to Houston, saying:

"Just got a wire from the boss for you and Morgan; did you know anything about this kind of an arrangement?"

Houston opened the telegram, and read:

"Van Dorn up to-morrow to set up machinery on trial; may not be able to come myself for a day or two. Have Morgan and Houston give him all help they can spare, but not to interfere with work. Blaisdell."

Houston read the message carefully, then said to Haight, who stood awaiting his reply:

"I knew nothing of their having made any definite arrangement. I remember hearing Van Dorn say something to Mr. Blaisdell, just before they all went away, about bringing one of his machines out here, but Blaisdell didn't seem to give him any encouragement at that time."

"He evidently has roped the old man in on it, at last," said Haight, seating himself.

"It looks like it," Houston answered indifferently.

"What is the machine anyway?" Haight inquired. "Is it any good?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Houston, "because I know absolutely nothing about it, except that it is for the reduction of ores. I heard Van Dorn allude to it two or three times while he was here, and he seemed quite enthusiastic about it, which I thought was, of course, perfectly natural. Where is Morgan?" Houston continued, "have you told him?"

Haight shook his head; "Morgan is at the Y, I suppose, as usual, and nobody will see him before sometime to-morrow. Have you noticed that fellow lately, Mr. Houston? Half the time he don't seem to know what he's about."

"I have noticed that he scarcely appears like himself, of late," Houston replied; "he seems to have some serious trouble."

"He's been losing pretty heavy lately, I guess, that's what's the matter; he's awful reckless in his gambling, it's neck or nothing, with him. I tell you," Haight continued, watching Houston sharply, "Morgan would get the G.B. pretty sudden if the boss got onto the way he's carrying sail."

"Possibly," said Houston, quietly, "but he will not know of it from me."

"No?" said Haight, with a curious, rising reflection.

"No, indeed," responded Houston, with some warmth, "when a man is in trouble, it is no time to give him a push downward; besides, I would not do or say anything to injure Morgan, anyway."

Haight looked up curiously, and even the faces of the ladies expressed a slight surprise.



"I didn't know you and Morgan were such good friends," Haight remarked wonderingly.

"I do not know," said Houston, "that either he or I consider that we are particular friends, though we are friendly enough, but I have learned this about Morgan; that whatever his principles, or his manner of life may be, he is far less to be blamed than people would ordinarily suppose."

"Well," said Haight, rising, "Morgan and I have been together, off and on, for the last three years, but I don't know anything about him except just what I have seen for myself, what anybody can see; of course his way isn't my way, but then, we don't any of us think alike, and I've never had any fault to find with him, and we've got along together first rate. I suppose," he continued, "you will give directions in the morning for that fellow and his machines, for it isn't likely that Morgan will be around much before ten o'clock."

"Very well," said Houston, "I will be up early and will see that one of the six-horse teams is at the Y to meet him, and I can get through at the mines in season to be at the office by the time he will reach there; he probably will not get up before noon, with all that load."

Happening to glance toward Lyle, as Haight withdrew, Houston read in her eyes, in their look of eager expectancy, and the firm determination expressed in her face, that she fully understood the meaning of what had passed.

It was equally evident that Miss Gladden had received no hint of the situation, for at almost the same instant she inquired:

"Is Mr. Van Dorn going to erect one of his reducing machines here?"

Houston answered in the affirmative.

"He will be likely to remain here some time, then, will he not?"

"In all probability," Houston replied, "it must take considerable time to get one of those machines in perfect running order."

"Then of course he will be here when Mr. Rutherford returns, with his brother; they were all such intimate

friends, it will be pleasant for them to meet here. But I am surprised," she added, "that he is bringing one of his machines such a distance as this."

"Why so?" inquired Houston.

"Because, Mr. Winters told me that although the amalgamator was undoubtedly a valuable invention, and would prove a great success in a mining country, Van Dorn was too indolent to even try to introduce it among mining men, as it would require too much exertion on his part."

Houston smiled at this accurate description of his class mate.

Miss Gladden continued: "Mr. Winters said that Van Dorn was a fine fellow, but that he was never so happy as when engaged in some little scheme, apparently doing one thing, and in reality, doing something else, as when he was acting as mining expert for Mr. Winters."

"Well," said Houston, laughing, "if that is the characteristic of Mr. Van Dorn, it will not be best to mention it here, as the officers of the company are very suspicious anyway, and very guarded as to who is permitted to have access to the mines and mills, and we might unconsciously make it rather unpleasant for him."

The next morning, Houston went very early to the stables to order a team and three or four men to the Y to meet Van Dorn. Having given all necessary instructions, he returned to the house, but it was still early, and there was no one but Lyle in the breakfast room.

At a signal from Houston, she approached the doorway, where he remained standing, as from that position he could easily watch both the porch and the interior of the room, to assure himself that they were safe from listeners.

"I have just discovered recently," he began in a low tone, "that I am indebted to you for securing valuable assistance for me in my work here."

"Why?" she asked quickly, in surprise, "did Jack tell you that it was I who asked him to help you?"

"Certainly," replied Houston, "I naturally wished to know where he obtained his information, and he told me of your interview with him, and your persistent efforts

in my behalf. I want to thank you, for I appreciate your conduct under such circumstances; you acted wisely and nobly, and did the very best thing that could have been done."

"I am glad that I have your approval," she replied, "my overhearing what I did was unintentional and unavoidable, but having learned your plans, and that you needed help, I sought it from the only one competent to give it, and at the same time perfectly true and worthy of your confidence."

"You certainly made a noble use of the knowledge you had obtained; there are very few, Lyle, who could have been trusted with such a secret, and who would have proven so trustworthy."

"If you will pardon me for saying it, Mr. Houston, there is one other, whom you could, and, in my opinion, should trust with this."

Houston looked at her inquiringly.

"I mean Miss Gladden," was her response.

"I see you have given her no hint," he said, smiling.

"Not a word," Lyle answered, "it was not my place to do so; you know best what you wish her to know, and when, but I think you ought to confide in her fully, for she is a noble woman; you could trust her, and she would help you."

"I realize that," Houston replied, "but I did not wish her to be worried by this; there will probably be more or less danger before it is all over, and I thought she would be happier not to know."

Lyle lifted her beautiful head proudly, with a gesture so full of grace, Houston could not but observe it.

"If I were in her place," she said, slowly and firmly, and with peculiar emphasis, "and my lover were in any danger, I would far rather know it, and give him my help, if possible, my prayers and sympathy at any rate, than to remain in ignorance, and perhaps unconsciously hinder him."

Houston looked at Lyle in astonishment; was this clear-headed woman the untutored, untrained child of the mountains whom he had always regarded with a tender, chivalric regard, almost akin to pity?

Lyle continued; "Do not think that even if you refrain from telling her this secret, she will not know that it exists; she will be quick to see indications of a secret understanding between yourself and others,—between yourself and myself, even,—in which she has no share. Will that seem to her like confidence, or even justice, on your part. It will be better for her, for you and for me that you tell her your plans fully, for you will find her strong and true and brave, whatever the end shall prove."

"My dear Lyle," said Houston, slowly, "I believe you are right, and I will never consider you a child again; but I cannot understand how you, with your youth and inexperience, can think and act so wisely and well."

"We none of us know what we can do or be," she answered gravely, "till an emergency arises, and we are suddenly shown what is required of us."

"I will follow your suggestion at the first opportunity," Houston said, after a pause, "I shall tell Miss Gladden all that you know regarding my plans and my work, with but one reservation; for the present, I do not wish her to know that Mr. Cameron is related to me."

Lyle looked slightly surprised, "Very well," she answered, in a tone of assent, adding, "You are his nephew, are you not?"

"His nephew and his adopted son," Houston replied, with a peculiar smile.

"Ah!" she replied quietly, "I understand; Miss Gladden is to know nothing at present of your wealth."

"I have won her love with love, not with gold," he said proudly, "but she will find, by and by, that the latter is not lacking."

A remark of Miss Gladden's, which she had made in confidence, soon after her engagement to Houston, was suddenly recalled to Lyle's mind; "Whether he has money or not, I do not know or care, for I have enough for both of us."

A curious smile flitted over her face for a moment, but she only said, "You must be very wealthy!"

"I have enough," Houston responded, "to give to Miss Gladden the home of which she is worthy, but which she has never known; and," he added, "there is one thing,

my dear Lyle, upon which we are both agreed; that our home, wherever it shall be, shall be your home also, as our sister."

For a moment, Lyle's lips quivered, and she was unable to speak. At that instant, Haight entered the breakfast room, darting at them a look of curiosity and suspicion, as they stood together in the door-way. Houston was pleased to see Lyle's perfect self-control. Without stirring in the least from her place by his side, she asked, in the most matter-of-fact tone, whether Mr. Van Dorn would be likely to arrive from the Y in season for dinner, and what room it would be best to prepare for him.

"You had better let him share my room, in case he has no objections," Houston answered indifferently, "for you like to keep your rooms in readiness for guests as much as possible, and Rutherford, when he returns, will probably room with his brother."

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## CHAPTER XXX.

As Houston was hurrying up from the mines at about eleven o'clock, on his way to the office, he met Morgan, just started on his rounds, and was shocked at the change which a few hours had made in his appearance. His heavy gait, his pale, haggard face and bloodshot eyes, told, not only of late hours and terrible dissipation, but of some severe mental strain, also. Morgan half smiled, as he saw Houston's look of pained surprise.

"Yes," he said, "I know I look pretty hard this morning, but I was up late; I guess I'll be all right in a day or two. What's this Haight's been telling me about one of those fellows coming out here with some mining machinery? Which one is it, that English dude?"

"No," answered Houston, "Van Dorn, the one with glasses, he was the inventor, you remember."

"Well, if he's invented anything that will make old Rivers hand out any cash, he'd better get a patent on it, that's all I've got to say. How in thunder the old man ever gave his consent to his coming out here, monkey-

fooling around with his machines, is more'n I can make out; but if the company want him up here, I'm sure I don't care a damn. The boss himself isn't coming up, is he?"

"Not for a day or two," replied Houston.

"Well," said Morgan, with one of his characteristic shrugs, "I guess I'll have to spruce up a bit, before he comes."

"That is so, Morgan," said Houston, kindly, "I wouldn't want Mr. Blaisdell to see you as you look this morning; I'm too much a friend of yours myself for that."

"Oh well, I'll be all right before he gets here. Who's going down to meet that fellow and his contraptions?"

"I sent Hayes down with two or three men, and a six-horse team, early this morning."

"Good for you!" laughed Morgan, starting on his way, "You'd make a first-rate boss 'round here; guess I'll have to give you a raise."

Houston walked slowly down the road after Morgan left him, having apparently forgotten his haste. The story which Morgan had told him a few nights before, of his own life, had awakened his pity for the man as nothing else could have done. He felt that Morgan was in serious trouble, and in danger of losing his position, and that he was already where it would take very little to drive him to complete ruin. He resolved to seize the first opportunity that presented itself, to try to ascertain the cause of his trouble, and to assist him in any way that he possibly could.

On reaching the office, he found considerable work awaiting him, and for a while, all other thoughts were banished from his mind. About noon, a heavy rumbling and rattling attracted his attention, and, going to the door, he saw the slowly approaching team, winding from side to side of the steep, canyon road, the powerful horses straining and panting under the heavy load. Perched on the top of the load, under a wide-spread umbrella, and fanning himself with his straw hat, was Van Dorn, his face irradiated by a broad smile as he caught sight of Houston. Two of the men walked beside the team,

blocking the wheels with rocks, as the horses were occasionally stopped to rest. As they came within speaking distance, Van Dorn sang out merrily:

"I say, Houston, this is what I call up-hill work; it has been a pretty hard pull all the way."

"Yes," said Houston, "particularly hard on you, judging by appearances."

Van Dorn laughed, and proceeded to close his umbrella, while an expansive grin broke over the face of one of the workmen, trudging along the hot, dusty road. At the brow of the hill, the team again stopped to rest, and Van Dorn descended from his lofty position, Houston meanwhile giving instructions to the driver:

"Drive over to the stables, Hayes, and take the horses off and let them rest; after dinner, put on another set of horses, and drive to the mills; we will be there to see to the unloading."

"Well, Everard, old boy, how are you?" exclaimed Van Dorn, as they started for the office; "I started within five hours after I received your telegram, and here I am, at your service."

"When did you reach Silver City? yesterday?" inquired Houston.

"Yesterday!" exclaimed Van Dorn, "my dear boy, do you think the world was made in one day? No, sir; I got in the day before, and spent the remainder of that day, and all of yesterday in cultivating the good graces of your company. I went straight for their offices, and it took all the arguments and persuasion I could muster, with some treating, and a good deal of judicious flattery thrown in, before I could get the old fellows to consent to my giving the machine a trial. I got around Blaisdell pretty easy after I had flattered him a little, but that Rivers is a beast! Said he didn't see why I was so anxious to have them test the machine, and all that! I explained, of course, that this was the first I had ever brought it out into the west, and they were so well known that if I could only get their endorsement, and so on and so forth. Oh, I want to tell you all about it later, and if you don't acknowledge that I'm a born diplomat, I'll give up; but at present, my first business must be to allay

these pangs of hunger, they are becoming unendurable."

"Certainly, we will go to the house at once," said Houston, preparing to close the office.

"Wait a minute!" said Van Dorn, diving furiously into his pockets; "I attended to that little business that you wrote me about, just according to directions, and I want you to see if it is perfectly satisfactory before we go any further, and then I'll have it off my mind; why, confound it! where is that thing anyway?" he exclaimed, turning a half dozen pockets inside out, and emptying a heterogeneous collection upon the desk before him. "Oh, here it is! I knew I had it safe somewhere; there now, Everard, I took as much pains as if it had been for myself, it was one of the finest stones I could find; I think it is a beauty, and I hope you will like it."

He handed a small case to Houston, partially open, from whose depths of white velvet a superb diamond ring flashed forth its wondrous rays, seeming almost to brighten the dingy little room in which they were standing.

"It is indeed a beauty," said Houston, "perfect! I could not have made a better selection myself. I knew I could trust to your good judgment, Arthur, and I am exceedingly obliged; I'll do as much for you when you are ready for a ring of this kind."

"All right, I'm glad if you like it. I believe I sent my congratulations by letter, but I'll renew them now. I only hope the lady herself will be pleased with the selection."

On their way to the house, Van Dorn said: "Ned Rutherford has gone to the coast to meet his brother, I suppose."

"Yes; you probably know he and Morton are intending to stop here on their return?"

"Yes; Mort, as soon as he found you were here, and especially after I gave him an inkling of what was going on, said he should certainly stop as he came back. You ought to have seen him though, when I told him you were out here! Good gracious! he was simply thunder-struck! He said Ned had been writing all along about a Houston, from Chicago, that he had met on the



train, and that he was a fine fellow, and all that; but of course he never dreamed it was you."

The remainder of the day passed very swiftly, for there was much to be done. After dinner, Houston and Van Dorn went down to the mills and superintended the unloading and unpacking of the machinery; then, as it was too late in the day to begin preparations for its erection, Houston visited the mines, Van Dorn accompanying him only a little way into the main shaft. As they came out together, half an hour later, and started for the office, Van Dorn drew a small piece of ore from his pocket, saying:

"I've discovered now where that fine ore on the dump of the famous Sunrise lode came from."

"Yes," said Houston, "and you will make other discoveries, shortly."

At the office there was much to be said on both sides; Van Dorn giving his friend messages and directions from Mr. Cameron, and giving also the particulars of his interview with the company, and how he had finally obtained their consent for the erection of the machinery at their mills.

Houston, on his part, related what he had been doing in the few weeks intervening since Van Dorn's former visit, and explained his new position as assistant superintendent of the group of mines in which they were most interested.

Van Dorn whistled; "That's good!" he exclaimed, "I wondered how it was that you were going in and out among the mines in that way, I thought that was something new. Have you found any one whom we can trust to help us?"

In reply, Houston told his friend of Jack, of his experience and skill as a miner, and of his offer to help them.

Van Dorn was greatly interested, and before they were aware, the afternoon had passed, and it was time to close the office and return to the house.

At the supper table that evening, the diamond ring appeared, flashing on the white, shapely hand of Leslie Gladden, and she herself looked radiantly beautiful.

After the meal was over, Morgan, who was still pale and haggard, and had been very silent at the table, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and started down the road.

"Morgan," called Houston, "where are you going?"

"I dun'no," he answered moodily, "down to the Y, I guess, by and by."

"Well, hold on a minute, I will walk down with you a ways; I want to see you."

"All right," responded Morgan, walking on very slowly.

Houston hastily excused himself to Miss Gladden and Van Dorn, and hurrying after Morgan, soon overtook him. For some time, Houston talked with him regarding the work for the next day, and the men who could best be detailed to help Van Dorn. They had reached the same spot where they had stopped to talk a few nights before, and, as then, were seated on the rocks. At last, the business arrangements were all completed, and Morgan made a move as if to start, and then Houston's real errand in overtaking him became apparent.

"Morgan, you are not fit to be out to-night, you must have rest, you will break down living this way."

"Yes," said Morgan, raising his hollow, heavy eyes to Houston's face, "I'm about done up, that's a fact."

"I wouldn't go to the Y to-night, if I were you; come back to the house and get a good night's rest, it will make a different man of you."

Morgan looked undecided for a moment; "I wouldn't be no use going up there now," he answered gloomily, "I couldn't rest if I tried. I haven't slept scarcely any for three nights; but I ain't going to stay out late to-night as I've been doing; I shan't play after midnight. I'm going to have two or three games just to see what luck I'll have, and if I don't have luck, why, that ends it, I ain't going to play all night."

"Morgan," said Houston earnestly, "you spoke the other night about money; now, as I told you then, if you need any money, I'm your friend, and I'll gladly accommodate you with whatever you need."

For the first time in all their acquaintance, Morgan's

careless, indifferent manner changed, and for a few moments he seemed touched.

"Yes, I believe you," he said, after a pause, "I believe you're more of a friend to me than anybody else. Blaisdell would kick me out quicker'n it takes to say so, if he knew just how I stand to-night. Even Haight's got the big-head and puts on his airs since he's seen I'm down; you're the only one that's showed me any kindness."

"Now, Morgan, just say what money you need, and you shall have it; I want to help you out of this," said Houston.

"No," said Morgan, decidedly, "if I am a gambler, and all that, I ain't going to take the wages from a fellow that works for less than I do, to help me out of trouble. The Lord knows you've earnt your money, for you've worked faithful."

"Never mind about that, Morgan," said Houston, hastily, "I'm not wholly dependent on my salary; I had a good little sum of money laid by before I came out here; there is plenty, I will not miss it, and you are welcome to it."

"Much obliged to you, Houston, but I can't take it,—not now, at any rate,—maybe I'll call on you for it to-morrow, if I don't have luck to-night."

"You are welcome to it whenever you want it," said Houston cordially, his hand on Morgan's shoulder; "I only wish you were not going to the Y to-night."

"Well," said Morgan, as he rose slowly, "don't think I don't appreciate your kindness, for I do. You've heard me say that I didn't believe in honor in anybody; I guess I'll have to take that back, for if there is such a thing as honor, you've got it. I don't know how it is," he said, with a heavy sigh, then added slowly, "I guess you've been raised different somehow, from most of us out here. The Lord knows how I was raised."

He started a few steps down the road, hesitated, and came back.

"Houston, there's one thing I want to say to you, for you've been good to me, that's this; look out for Haight; he's no friend of yours, and I guess you're sharp enough

to know it, but maybe you don't know what a sneaking, cowardly cur he is; look out for him!"

"Thank you, Morgan, I will."

"He ain't like me," he continued, "if I don't like anybody I let 'em know it, and fight 'em fair and square; you can tell that by the way I bucked up against you, when you first came here," and he smiled at the recollection, the first time he had smiled in the whole conversation.

"Morgan," said Houston, "I've been sorry for that a good many times since; if I had known about you then what you have since told me, I never would have been so severe in my judgment of you."

"Oh, that was all right," he answered, "it did me good; I didn't like you very well at first, but I've always had a liking for you ever since. Well, so long!" and with a faint smile, Morgan went on his way.

Houston stood watching him for a few moments, then turned back in the direction of the house, little thinking how, or where, they would meet again.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

The next morning dawned fair and cloudless, giving promise of one of those royal days, so frequent in the almost perfect climate of the higher altitudes.

Long before noon the heat would be intense, but in the early morning there was wafted down from the mountain side, where the pines were nodding and whispering so mysteriously, a cool, exhilarating breeze, which kissed the surface of the azure lake, sleeping so peacefully, and, awakening immediately into smiles, it lay rippling and dimpling with laughter in the sunlight.

The vines, transplanted by Miss Gladden and Lyle, under their fostering care, had transformed the little porch into a bower of beauty. Here stood Van Dorn, his fair, almost feminine face flushed with pleasure, and his blue eyes sparkling, as the light breeze played with the auburn curls clustering about his forehead, and he looked forth on the beauty of the scene.

"Ah—h!" he exclaimed, drawing a long breath, "isn't this refreshing after the stifling heat and dust of the journey out here? Isn't it glorious?"

"It is," responded Houston, "this is one of the mornings when it is a joy just simply to live and breathe."

Houston was fired with new ambition that morning; he would no longer have to work alone, keeping his anxieties and doubts, his plans and discoveries alike to himself; from henceforth he would have companionship, counsel and assistance, and he felt a new interest and enthusiasm.

Immediately after breakfast, the two set forth upon their first day's work. Going first to the mills, Houston secured the services of two or three men who could be spared from the ordinary work, to assist Van Dorn in making preparations for the erection of the machinery; then he left for his early visit to the mines.

It was nearly ten o'clock when, having finished his round of duties at the mines, and coming up to the surface from the cool, underground workings, he found the heat almost unendurable, and strolled over to the mills, to see how Van Dorn was progressing. The latter did not seem averse to stopping for a few moments, and for a while, the two chatted and laughed with the old, careless abandon of their college days, without a thought of the more serious side of life, until, something being needed for the work, which Houston thought was in the tool-house, they proceeded together to look for it.

Houston was still searching for the needed implements, when Van Dorn, who was near the door, called out:

"I say, Everard, here's a small specimen of humanity who seems to be looking for you in a desperate hurry," and an instant later, he heard a familiar voice say:

"Is the boss in there, mister? Le'me in quick, I wan'ter see 'im!"

Turning quickly, he saw Bull-dog, breathless, pale and quivering with excitement.

"Say, boss," he gasped, before Houston could speak, "they want yer—down ter the Y,—Morgan has shot hisself!"

"What is that, boy?" exclaimed Houston hoarsely, clearing the space between them at a bound.

"Morgan's shot hisself, 'n they sent us fer yer,—me'n Hank,—he's out there," with a backward jerk of his thumb over his shoulder toward the open door.

Houston sprang to the door; another boy was talking excitedly with Van Dorn, while his horse stood, panting heavily and covered with dust and foam.

"Here's the man you want," said Van Dorn, turning a white face toward Houston, "Great God, Everard!" he exclaimed, "Morgan has killed himself!"

"He is not dead!" exclaimed Houston, turning towards the boy.

The latter nodded; "They found 'im shot through the head, 'n this was in his hand, 'n the cops won't let nobody in till you come," and he handed Houston a bit of paper.

It was a scrap of newspaper, crumpled and spattered with blood, and, as Houston smoothed it out, he read on the margin, in characters wavering and almost illegible, written with a trembling hand, but still Morgan's writing, "Send to the camp for Houston, he's the only friend I've got."

For an instant, it seemed to Houston as though the glorious sunlight had suddenly turned to blackness, a blackness in which the scrap of paper gleamed white before him, its red spots glowing like spots of flame. He seemed again to see Morgan as he looked when parting from him the previous evening; the haggard face, with its hollow eyes and faint, pathetic smile, and as he recalled his words in reply to his own repeated offers of money, there seemed a new meaning in them; "Maybe I'll call on you for it to-morrow if I don't have luck to-night."

But Houston realized there was no time to waste, and in a few moments he was mounted on a powerful gray horse, on his way to the Y, notwithstanding Van Dorn's protests on account of the intense heat, having requested the latter to explain his absence at the house. Just as he was about to start, Bull-dog begged to be allowed to ride with him, to which Houston consented, and lifting the little fellow up, seated him in front of himself. Very little was said, for the horse seemed to understand what

was expected of him, and sped like the wind down the narrow canyon road, but Houston's hand rested kindly on Bull-dog's shoulder, steadying the slender frame, and, at the same time, warming the heart of the forlorn little waif, to whom even the touch of kindness was something exceedingly rare.

Houston's mind was occupied with thoughts of the terrible scene he was rapidly approaching, as well as with memories of his last interview with Morgan on the preceding night. At last, having crossed a ravine, the horse slackened his pace, as he climbed the steep ascent on the other side, and Houston, almost unconsciously, spoke his thoughts aloud.

"Poor Morgan!" he said, with a heavy sigh, "poor fellow! If I could only have saved him from this! God knows I would have given him any amount of money to have prevented this."

"'Twouldn't ha' been no use, sir," Bull-dog broke in quickly, eager to console Houston, "'twouldn't ha' been no use to have give 'im money, 'cause, ye see, them fellers that he played with would ha' got it all."

"Who were they?" inquired Houston.

"Oh, there was Faro Dick and Slicky Sam, and a lot of 'em; Morgan wasn't no match for fellers like them, they was all too swift fer him."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I seen 'em playin' lots o' times, and they're all reg'lar sharpers, 'n Morgan, he'd got reckless, 'n he didn't stan' no show against 'em."

Houston looked down wonderingly and pityingly upon the little fellow, young in years, but who knew so much of the dark side of life, but nothing more was said, as, having reached the top of the hill, the station was close at hand.

Having left his horse in charge of one of the company's men, Houston, accompanied by Bull-dog as guide, proceeded across the street, to the group of dirty, disreputable-looking buildings containing the saloons, gambling houses and dance halls. He had little need of a guide, for, before the shabbiest and most disreputable of the entire lot, was gathered a motley crowd, gazing with awe-

struck curiosity at the building in which had been enacted the tragedy of the night before. It was a saloon with gambling rooms in the rear. Here Morgan had played his last game,—just to see what luck he would have,—as he had said to Houston, and from which he had come forth ruined, despairing, desperate.

Passing through the crowd of jabbering Chinamen and “dagoes,” of miners off shift, drawn hither by curiosity, and of gamblers of all grades from the professional expert to the “tin-horn,” Houston found his way around the corner of the building, down into an alley, dark, dismal and reeking with filth. Here were groups of slatternly, unkempt women, some of whom stared at him with brazen faces, while others slunk away, not quite lost to shame.

At last they came to a rickety stair-way, and as they neared the top, Bull-dog whispered:

“There’s some of ’em now; that tall feller is Faro Dick, he deals down stairs, and the little, black feller is Slicky, and that short, fat one, that’s Brocky Joe.”

The group gathered about the door-way at the head of the stairs eyed Houston curiously as he approached. He gave them only a quick, keen glance, but in that glance he had detected the trio named by Bull-dog, and they cowered visibly beneath the scorn and contempt which flashed from his eye, while the entire group of loungers made way, impelled partly by an unconscious respect for the broad, powerful shoulders, and splendid, athletic frame.

Down a dark, narrow hall, Bull-dog led the way to a door guarded by two men, who touched their caps respectfully to Houston. They were two of the mining company’s watchmen, who were kept at the station to guard their property, and to preserve order generally, and hence were designated by the gamins of the place as police and “cops.”

Silently they unlocked and opened the door for Houston, and one of them entered with him. It was a small room, evidently a woman’s, and its general squalor and dilapidation were made more apparent by tawdry, shabby bits of finery strewn here and there. Curtains of red



damask, faded and ragged, hung at the window, excluding the daylight, and on a small table a kerosene lamp had burned itself out. But Houston took little notice of the room; as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he saw but one object.

Across the bed in one corner of the room, lay Morgan, his left arm thrown out across the pillows, the other dropped at his side, and a revolver clenched in his right hand. His head was turned slightly to one side, exposing the ghastly wound near the temple, his face was blackened and mutilated, but still bore traces of the terrible strain of those last few hours of life.

Houston stepped back, even his firm nerves quivering, and his heart throbbing with a great sorrow for the life so suddenly quenched in the darkness of despair.

On a chair were Morgan's hat and coat, where he had thrown them, and as Houston turned toward the little table, he saw there a newspaper from which a scrap had been torn. Taking the bit of paper, containing Morgan's last message, from his pocket, he compared them; it fitted exactly, and beside the paper lay a bit of pencil with which those last words had been written, and to Houston, with his keen perception and vivid imagination, the whole scene of the previous night with its minute and pathetic details, seemed passing before his vision. He turned to the watchman:

"Open the window," he said, and his voice sounded strange even to himself, "draw back those curtains, this place is stifling."

Upon inquiry, Houston found the watchman could give him very little information. In passing down the alley at about eight o'clock that morning, his attention had been arrested by screams issuing from the building. On rushing up-stairs, he saw a crowd gathering about the door of this room, and, on entering, was shocked at the sight revealed. Mollie, the girl who usually occupied the room, was screaming hysterically, but when able to talk explained that she had been out all night and had but just returned. Morgan was in the habit of coming to the room, and had a key, but he had not been there of late, having gambled every night till daylight.

Her screams had attracted nearly the whole neighborhood, some of whom corroborated her statements, and one or two testified to having heard a shot sometime about midnight, but nothing had been thought of it, as it was supposed to be some row in the gambling rooms below. The watchman had ordered the crowd out of the room, and sent the messenger for Houston, and also a telegram to Silver City for the coroner, who was expected on the noon train.

As it was nearly noon, Houston decided to step over to the depot, leaving the room in charge of the watchman. On his way, he heard various comments from groups gathered here and there. Passing a half-dozen miners, he heard one of them say:

"If he'd 'a been a union man, we'd 'a taken care of 'im, but he worked for the bosses, and helped 'em to make big money, and now, let the bosses take care of 'im and bury 'im."

A bitter smile crossed Houston's face, and stepping into the little telegraph office, he sent a message, first, in his own name, to one of the undertaking firms of Silver City, for everything that was needed to be sent up by the special freight that afternoon; and then a brief dispatch to Mr. Blaisdell, stating what had occurred, but that the affairs of the company were all right, and there was no necessity for his coming to the camp immediately.

A few moments later, the train arrived, bringing the coroner, and as quickly as possible the inquest was held. Very few facts were developed beyond those already learned by Houston, excepting the extent of Morgan's losses. These included not only everything which he had possessed, even to his watch and a few pieces of jewelry, but in addition, a large sum of money advanced him by Brocky Joe. Those with whom he was playing testified that he had quit shortly before midnight, and left the hall rather hastily. At the time, they thought he had gone to borrow more money, and perhaps try his luck at some other place, but nothing more was seen of him, and they soon forgot the occurrence.

When all was over and the crowd was slowly dispersing, Houston saw several members of the gambling fra-

ternity approaching him, headed by the two designated by Bull-dog as Slick Sam and Brocky Joe. The latter, a stout, red-faced individual, with flaming necktie and blazing diamonds, was evidently speaker for the entire party.

"We would like," he began, in a high-pitched, falsetto voice, "to express our regrets for what has occurred, and I wish to state on behalf of my associates here, and also personally, that there was no ill feeling toward your friend, and I am perfectly willing to overlook the small amount of indebtedness; and if there is anything we can do, in the way of sharing the burial expenses, or anything of the kind, we shall be glad to do so."

"Your assistance is not needed," replied Houston, in a cold, cutting tone, "you have already done your work; you and your ilk have brought him where he is, and that is enough," and he turned abruptly from them.

As he re-entered the room, he met Mollie, who cast an appealing glance at him. She could not have been over twenty years of age, but she looked worn and haggard. Her hair was disheveled, large, dark rings encircled her heavy, lusterless eyes, now swollen with weeping, and there was a look of helpless and hopeless despair in her glance that aroused Houston's pity. It was a new experience for him to be brought into contact with these wrecked and ruined lives, and sorrow for the one life which had gone out so suddenly and needlessly, made him pitiful toward all.

A look of pity, a word of pure, disinterested kindness, was something new in the life of the poor creature before him, and she began sobbing afresh:

"He's gone," she moaned, "and I don't want to live no longer."

"Did you care so much for him?" asked Houston, wonderingly.

"Yes," she sobbed, "I never cared for nobody but him. I thought once he cared for me, but after a while I found he didn't, and then I went to the bad as fast as I could, but still I cared for him. I never was very good, for I never had no chance to be, but I'd 'a been different from what I am, if he'd only 'a cared for me."

Houston went back into the wretched room, and looked long and sadly at the one who, in his last moments of despair, had called him his friend. He recalled the story told him that night among the rocks; he thought of the life ruined by a mother's neglect and sin, and now of another life shut out in hopeless misery because of his indifference and neglect, and Houston realized at that moment, as never before, the influences, for good or for evil, extending from one human life to another, spreading onward and onward,

"As wave follows wave across the sea,"

till the widening circles at last touch the shores of eternity.

An hour or two later, when Houston stepped over to the depot to meet the incoming special freight, he was somewhat surprised to see Mr. Blaisdell step from the train, and in his white face, his firmly set mouth with its hard lines, and his pale blue eyes, it could readily be seen that he knew nothing of pity or mercy for the man who had served him so faithfully.

"I did not expect you so early, Mr. Blaisdell," said Houston, as they exchanged greetings, "I thought after receiving my dispatch you would feel no anxiety, and would probably not come out till the evening train."

"Your telegram was a great relief," Mr. Blaisdell answered in an excited tone, "but I was all ready to come, as, from the tenor of Haight's message this morning, I feared the worst. You are sure the affairs of the company are all right?"

"Perfectly sure," replied Houston, calmly, "so far as money is concerned, poor Morgan has wronged no one but himself."

"Well," said Mr. Blaisdell, with a sigh of relief, "I am glad to hear that, but this is an outrageous affair,—simply outrageous,—a man in his responsible position, trusted as he has been, coming to such an end as this, under such circumstances and amid such surroundings! It is a disgrace to himself, and to those associated with him in business,—to the entire company!"

The thought flashed through Houston's mind that a deeper disgrace than this awaited the company, but he only replied:

"I had not looked at it in that light, Mr. Blaisdell; I, as one of his associates, certainly feel no disgrace attached to myself. I had thought only of the terrible pity for a life so needlessly ruined and lost."

"Pity!" said Mr. Blaisdell, contemptuously, "If a man willfully degrades himself and disgraces his friends, I have no pity for him, he deserves none for such dishonorable, dishonest conduct."

"His dishonesty, as you term it, must have been of rather an unusual type," said Houston, "since I offered him money only last night, and he refused to take it."

"So you knew of his habits and offered him money? It was your duty to have reported him to me."

"I do not need you, Mr. Blaisdell, or any one else, to tell me what my duty is here," replied Houston, with dignity, "I did not know until recently to what extent Morgan was gambling, and when a man is in trouble, I will never give him a push downward."

One of the workmen just then came to Houston for instructions regarding the shipment which he had ordered from Silver City, thus attracting Mr. Blaisdell's attention in that direction.

"What is this, Houston?" he exclaimed angrily, "what does this mean? You certainly had no right, no authority to order these things; the company will not pay one cent toward the burial of a man who has proven himself so unworthy of the confidence reposed in him."

"Mr. Blaisdell," said Houston, calmly, but in a tone his employer had never heard before, "there is not the least necessity for the company to pay one cent, or for you to feel any concern in this matter. I have ordered these things myself, personally, upon my own responsibility."

For the first time Mr. Blaisdell had found an employee who evidently did not stand in fear of him, and surprise held him silent for a moment.

"Very well," he answered, in an altered tone, "but I must say I can see no reason for such a quixotic proceed-

ing on your part; I never supposed you and Morgan were particular friends."

"Here is my reason," Houston replied, handing him the bit of paper bearing Morgan's last words; "When a despairing man, in his last moments, appeals to me as his friend, and his only friend, even though that man were my worst enemy, I would feel in duty bound to do for him everything that a friend could do."

Mr. Blaisdell returned the slip, and there was a new respect indicated in tone and manner, as he replied:

"I don't know but you are right, do as you think best. I am going up to the camp, you can come whenever you are ready."

"I shall be there in a few hours," said Houston, and they separated.

A little later, everything that he could do had been done, and as Houston looked for the last time upon the pale face, where the angel of death was already smoothing out the lines traced by the last few days of suffering, and softening the features into a look of contentment and peace, he was glad that in the last moments of that life, there had come faith, even in one human being.

Early the next morning, a little group was gathered in a beautiful, secluded spot, on the mountain side, overlooking the station. Houston and Van Dorn were there, and a clergyman from a little parish in a small town a few miles distant, to whom the sad story had been told, read the simple but impressive words of the burial service and offered a brief prayer. And, as the weary body was lowered to its final resting place, at the foot of the murmuring pines, there came to the minds of Houston and Van Dorn the memory of the burial of a class-mate in the old college days, and simultaneously their voices rose on the clear, morning air, blending in the words chanted on that former occasion:—

"Rest, brother, rest in thy last, long sleep."

Slowly the little company dispersed, each going his own way. Upon Houston's mind the events of those last twenty-four hours had left an impression never to be ef-

faced, but to most in that community one human life, more or less, was of slight significance. To them, life was but one great game, in which fortune, reputation, character, everything which they possessed, whether much or little, was staked on the high card. No wonder that little thought was given to the losers, dropping out, one by one!

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

The following days were crowded with work for Houston. A bookkeeper was immediately sent over from Silver City to do the office work, but, excepting Houston, the company had no man, both competent and who could be trusted, to fill Morgan's position. It was therefore arranged that for the next few weeks, until they could ascertain the address of a former superintendent, who had recently returned east, and communicate with him, Houston was to superintend the working of all the mines.

This involved much additional work and responsibility, but Houston filled the position so satisfactorily and showed such business tact and executive ability, that Mr. Blaisdell, on his return to Silver City, had fully determined to retain him permanently as superintendent at the mines, and, if possible, secure Barden, their former man, as an assistant.

"I tell you, Rivers, that Houston is a capable man, wonderfully capable," he said, having related to the remaining officers of the company Houston's success in filling Morgan's position.

"It seems to me, Blaisdell," said Mr. Brunnell, the benevolent looking old gentleman whom Houston had seen on his first visit to the offices, and one of the board of directors, "it seems to me you had better look out for him yourself; that young man is rising so fast, he's likely to oust you yet."

"Well, no, I guess not," replied Mr. Blaisdell confidently, with his complacent smile, "I don't think you fellows could get along without me, just yet. I don't know what we would do with him, though, in case of any disagree-

ment, he's as independent as though he were a millionaire instead of a salaried clerk; he would never care a rap for anything we might say, he would take his own way every time," and Mr. Blaisdell gave an account of his interview with Houston at the Y.

"Humph!" sniffed Mr. Rivers contemptuously, "You'd better let me manage that fellow, Blaisdell, he'll run away with you."

"He'll run away with those mines up there, Blaisdell," chuckled Mr. Brunnell, peering over his glasses at the general manager, who was strutting pompously about the office.

"Well, you fellows may joke as much as you please," said Mr. Blaisdell, a little testily, "I tell you the man is smart."

"Confound it! I know he's smart; I tell you he's too damned smart for you!" responded Mr. Rivers, who had very little respect for Mr. Blaisdell's business ability, but found him a very convenient cat's-paw.

As early as possible after the completion of the new arrangements at the mines, Houston and Van Dorn, in accordance with a previous engagement, visited Jack at his cabin. The hour was late, and as they entered the room already familiar to Houston, a lamp was burning brightly, but a heavy screen hung over it, concentrating the light upon the table beneath, on which lay various drawings and tracings, and allowing only a dim light to pervade the room.

Houston introduced Van Dorn, whom Jack greeted with characteristic courtesy, though with something of his old reserve, and having seated his guests, he at once proceeded to the discussion of the business which had brought them together.

In reply to an inquiry of his regarding the present situation of affairs, Houston informed him of the arrangement just completed by which he was to have entire charge of the work at the mines for the next few weeks, until the coming of Mr. Barden.

"Your present position is much more favorable for your work," replied Jack, "it is exceedingly doubtful whether



the company will have any use for the services of Mr. Barden."

Houston then stated briefly what had been done since Van Dorn's arrival, adding in conclusion, "Of course, we would have accomplished more within this time, had it not been for the confusion and changes resulting from Morgan's sudden death."

"Yes," said Jack, "that has hindered you temporarily, but it will result to your advantage. All that I regretted was that an examination which I hoped you and Mr. Van Dorn might be able to make last week, immediately upon his arrival, will now have to be postponed until next week, but even that is better as it is."

"How is that?" inquired Houston, with much interest, "to what do you refer?"

"I refer to the Lucky Chance mine; are you familiar with that property?"

"Not especially," said Houston, "I have paid no attention to it, as it was not one in which our company was interested, nor one of which I was in charge. Since the recent change, I have visited the mine once with Mr. Blaisdell, but we only went in a short distance, and he informed me there was but little work done there, and but few men employed."

"Yes," replied Jack, with peculiar emphasis, "but that 'little work' as he terms it yields the company a larger percentage than any other single mine which they own."

Houston's face expressed considerable astonishment. "You surprise me," he exclaimed, "because I thought I knew their best paying properties, and I never would have supposed that was one of them, either from my own observation, or from anything I have heard of it."

"It would not be for the interests of the company to have much said regarding the mine, or to have the workings investigated very closely. You are probably aware that the claim adjoins the Yankee Boy?"

"Certainly," answered Houston, "I am aware of that fact."

"Very well," replied Jack, rising and going to the table. "I have prepared some diagrams here which I would like you and Mr. Van Dorn to examine. Here

you will see," he continued, as they drew their chairs near the table," the boundaries and underground workings of the Lucky Chance mine, with their approximate measurements. Please look them over and see if you detect any irregularities."

Both Houston and Van Dorn studied the diagram carefully for a moment, when the latter exclaimed:

"Why, the main tunnel extends more than a hundred feet beyond the boundary line."

"Now allow me to substitute this diagram," said Jack, spreading a larger tracing before them. "This is the same as the other with the addition of a portion of the boundary lines and underground workings of the adjoining claim, the Yankee Boy."

"Ah, I see," said Houston, "the tunnel from the Lucky Chance has been carried beyond the boundary line in such a direction as to strike the vein of the adjoining claim."

"That is it exactly," said Van Dorn, "no wonder the mine pays well!"

"As I stated before," continued Jack, "these measurements, and, to a certain extent, the course of the tunnel, are given approximately, as I had no means of ascertaining the exact data, but I know they are essentially correct. It only remains for you, gentlemen, to verify this, by making an examination of the tunnel and taking the courses and measurements exactly, and also by comparing the ore now taken out with that originally found in the mine, and with the ore of the Yankee Boy, and you will then have evidence of the greatest fraud which has been perpetrated upon the rightful owners of the Yankee Boy, and which has been carried on for the last four or five years."

"But how did you discover this?" asked Houston.

"I first came here," replied Jack, "shortly after the sale of the Yankee Boy group of properties had been consummated. Within a few months afterward, the company located the Lucky Chance mine; development work was carried forward as rapidly as possible, quite a number of men being employed, of which I was one. It was evident that in locating this mine, the company hoped they

had struck an extension of the vein of the Yankee Boy lode; it proved of an entirely different character, however, yielding rather a low-grade ore. The claim was surveyed and patented as soon as the necessary amount of improvements, required by law, had been placed upon it. After obtaining patent, the company then extended the tunnel in an entirely different direction, and, as you will find upon investigation, beyond the boundary line, until it intersected a portion of the Yankee Boy vein. Here a body of very rich ore was struck, and the mine has been a paying property ever since. For this last work very few men were retained, and but few have been employed there since, those few being men whom the company thought could be trusted, or upon whom they had some hold by which they could compel them to silence. I was employed there until very recently, and from the first had a thorough understanding of the course and extent of the different workings, and consequently am perfectly familiar with them."

"Everard," said Van Dorn, for whom work of this kind possessed a special attraction, "I think this is just about the kind of an expedition we will like."

"I think so myself," Houston replied, "but at the same time, it is the most risky piece of work we have yet undertaken, and we will have to depend upon our friend here for suggestions and advice. You will of course accompany us?" he added, turning to Jack, who had withdrawn from the table and was sitting in the dim light.

"Certainly," responded Jack, "it would be a very dangerous undertaking for two strangers to go through that part of the mine without a guide at any time, especially at night, and it will be at best, a hazardous piece of work."

"How many are employed there? and what class of men are they?" inquired Houston.

"About a dozen on the night shift," Jack replied, "mostly Cornish-men, but whatever their nationality, it is usually the most treacherous and brutal men that we have that are employed by the company in that mine. Maverick used to work there until he was transferred above ground. It will not be necessary for us to come in contact with very many of them, however, as they are

so widely scattered through the mine, and on the night shift next week, there will be four men,—a father and three sons,—who will do just about whatever I say, especially if a little money is given them. Mr. Houston's new position as superintendent, will aid us very materially. A visit from him, with me as guide, will not excite suspicion, but Mr. Van Dorn will be suspected in a moment, and we must disguise him."

Van Dorn whistled softly.

"Could you assume the Irish dialect, on an occasion like this, Mr. Van Dorn?" Jack inquired.

"An' shure," exclaimed Van Dorn, with the broadest accent imaginable, "an' will yez be afther tellin' me, be-dad! why I should not shpake me own mither tongue?"

Both Houston and Jack laughed at Van Dorn's ready answer.

"You will do," Jack said quietly, but in a tone so rich and musical as to chain the attention of his guests while he proceeded to plan the details of their visit to the mine.

In an hour or two, the *modus operandi* had been fully decided upon, and nothing remained but to fix the night for their expedition, and this it was thought best to leave to be determined by circumstances the following week. The instruments needed for taking measurements were to be taken down beforehand by Houston, and concealed in a safe place near the mine, and on the night of the examination, he was to go from the house directly to the mine, where he would be joined by Jack and Van Dorn, the latter dressed in a suit of Mike's mining clothes, and personating him as closely as possible.

All arrangements being now as nearly complete as possible, Houston and Van Dorn bade their host a cordial good night, and walked cheerfully homeward, in the cool, night air, under the star-lit sky, all unconscious of a pair of eyes, which from behind a large rock, had eagerly watched for their appearance, and followed their every movement.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

As Houston and Van Dorn disappeared around a turn in the road, the figure of Haight emerged into the starlight from behind a large rock where he had been concealed most of the time during their stay at the cabin. Incidentally he had seen them on their way to visit Jack, and the lateness of the hour combined with the direction in which they were going, aroused his curiosity to such a degree that he followed them at a distance, and having seen them enter the cabin, his suspicious nature was at once on the alert.

"I guess I'll find out what in the devil this means," he said to himself, as he paused behind a rock at a little distance, determined to ascertain what he could regarding their movements.

It was a long and wearisome watch; once or twice he ventured near the cabin, to see whether by closer observation he could obtain any clue to what might be going on within, but the closely shaded window gave no sign, and beyond an occasional low murmuring of voices, nothing disturbed the silence, except once a low, ominous growl from Rex, as he caught sight of Haight's skulking figure from his station just outside the door.

When at last the door opened, and Houston and Van Dorn stepped forth into the calm night, the lynx-eyed watcher failed to detect anything beyond a friendly leave-taking, after which the two walked homeward, chatting in the most commonplace manner imaginable.

"By George!" he soliloquized, as he followed at a safe distance, "I wonder if I haven't had my labor for my pains! But that did look mighty queer anyhow, their going 'round to see the old chap, and I'll wager there's something in it, too. I shouldn't wonder if that Van Dorn is out here in the interest of that old party who was looking at mines a while ago, and with Houston's help is going to get a few pointers. Jack knows pretty well

what is going on around here, and may be a little money would make him talk. I'm going to keep watch of some of these smart people, and I know of one or two that will help me about it. If I can get hold of anything, I'll report it to Rivers; Houston has pulled the wool over Blaisdell's eyes, but Rivers won't have anybody monkeying round these mines, and if I can once put him on the track, there'll be a few less of these swells about, and it will be money in my pocket."

Late as it was when Houston and Van Dorn returned to the house, Miss Gladden and Lyle had not retired. Houston had told Miss Gladden the secret of his business there in the mining camp, and, true to Lyle's prediction, he had found her, while quick to realize the dangers of his position, yet able to assist him by her readiness to enter into his feelings, her interest in his plans and her timely suggestions. Once she had met Jack since learning Houston's secret, and in a few, well-chosen words, had conveyed to him her knowledge of the fact that he was giving her lover aid and protection in his work, and her gratitude therefor.

She and Lyle were aware of the import of the visit to the cabin that night, and they sat in the dusky shadows, looking out into the night, alternately talking in low tones, and listening for the return of Houston and his friend.

Miss Gladden was the first to catch the sound of her lover's voice, as he and Van Dorn approached the house, and a moment later, they heard the ringing laugh of the latter.

"They are evidently in good spirits," remarked Lyle, "their visit must have been a satisfactory one."

"Mr. Van Dorn seems so jubilant they must have made some new discoveries," said Miss Gladden, "he never seems so happy as when he is ferreting out some fraud, or unearthing some dishonest scheme."

"There is material enough here to make his happiness complete for some time," said Lyle rather bitterly, "I only wish every one of the guilty parties could be brought to justice, but I doubt whether they ever will be."

"Why?" exclaimed Miss Gladden in surprise, "do you think Mr. Houston will fail after all?"

"No, not that necessarily," Lyle answered, "but even if he succeeds in getting his evidence together, and his friends come out from the east, I do not believe they will ever succeed in securing the ones who are most guilty, who have planned and plotted the whole thing. Over and over again, people whom they have wronged and defrauded have brought suit against them, but to no purpose; they are continually involved in litigation, but they always manage to evade the law in one way or another, I do not claim to understand how."

"I would not think they could escape with all the evidence accumulating against them now," said Miss Gladden thoughtfully.

"You wouldn't think so," replied Lyle, "but you don't know them. Who is that?" she asked suddenly, catching sight in the dim light of a figure approaching the house.

"It looks like Haight," said Miss Gladden, "but why is he creeping along so cautiously?"

"I believe he has been following Mr. Houston," said Lyle, quickly, "wait a minute, keep perfectly quiet, so he will think every one is asleep up stairs," and in an instant, she was going swiftly and noiselessly down the stairs. The door at the foot of the stairs was partially open, and Lyle could hear Haight, as, after opening the outside door very carefully, he stepped lightly toward the room occupied by Houston and Van Dorn; here he paused and listened, but evidently hearing nothing, he cautiously made his way across to the room of Mr. and Mrs. Maverick, the door of which was ajar.

"Jim!" he whispered, "Jim, wake up!"

"Who's that? What d'ye want?" came the response in a surly tone.

"Sh! don't make any noise," he whispered, "it's Haight; get up and come out on the porch, but be quiet about it; I want to have a talk with you."

A muttered assent was given, and Haight tip-toed softly out to the porch, and sat down.

Lyle crept up-stairs again to Miss Gladden.

"Don't be frightened," she said, "but I believe Haight must have seen or heard something;" and she hastily told what she had overheard.

"Now," said she in conclusion, "the window on the porch is open, and as soon as they are both outside, I will go there and listen. Even if I cannot hear all that is said I will probably catch enough to learn what is going on. You wait for me and keep perfectly quiet."

A few moments later, Maverick shuffled out on the porch and sat down beside Haight with a growl.

"Damned pretty time, I sh'd think, to talk! What in hell do you want?"

"Well, you were long enough getting out here," said Haight, in his smoothest tones, all unaware of a figure that had glided to the open window behind him, and now knelt within six feet of him. "Now quit your growling, for you and I are good friends, Jim, and I want your advice. Jim," he continued in a lower tone, "what would you think two fellows like Houston and Van Dorn would want with that old chap, Jack?"

"Huh?" said Maverick, rather stupidly, "what are ye drivin' at?"

"Wake up! you're half asleep, Jim! Your two dandy boarders here only just came home about twenty minutes ago; they've been for the last three or four hours down there in Jack's cabin, with the windows all shut tight and curtains down, and still as death. What do you suppose that means?"

"Damned if I know," was the laconic response.

"Now, Jim, don't be so uncommunicative; there may be something in this for you and me if we just put our heads together, 'two heads are better than one,' you know, so set your thinking machine to work and grind out some ideas."

"Well," said Maverick, slowly, "I dun'no what that Houston, damn him, would be runnin' 'round after Jack for, unless he wanted to get some p'inters on the mines some way."

"That's it, go ahead!" said Haight.

"Houston," continued Maverick, with an oath and ap-



plying a vile epithet, "is too all-fired smart to notice anybody, and Jack's another, so they'd be likely to hitch."

"That's right," said Haight, "now what object would he be likely to have in getting information from Jack?"

"I dun'no," said the other, "unless mebbe he's paid by somebody on the outside."

"Well," said Haight, "I guess we've got about the same idea of it; it's my opinion he is paid by somebody, and that somebody is Van Dorn, or whoever's backing him. I don't put much stock in this machinery business of his; he don't act like a fellow that needs to go peddling machines about the country, and I notice he don't seem in any great rush about putting it up, now he's got here; he ain't one of the kind that has to rustle for a living, like you and me. I think he's just out here getting pointers on the mines for that old fellow that was here a while ago, and he's probably paying Houston a good, round sum for helping him along, and now they've got Jack roped in on the deal."

"Well," said Maverick savagely, "if that's their game, I guess 'twill be dead easy stoppin' it any time we're a mind to; these 'ere mines is awfully unsafe places for a tenderfoot to be prowlin' 'round in," and he laughed a cruel laugh, very familiar to the listener at the window.

"That's so," assented Haight, "I think we'd better keep close watch of these fellows, and if they get too fresh, just have 'em laid out with a sandbag or two."

"Better'n that," said Maverick, "to take 'em some time in the mines; folks like them are likely to get dizzy and fall some times, or get in the way of the ore buckets and be knocked silly."

"Well, I'll tell you what I want you to do; I'll keep watch, and if I know of their going down to the cabin again, I want you to put some men on to watch out for them; we'll investigate and find out what is going on. Put on what men you please, and have them report to me, and we'll find out what this means, and make our plans accordingly."

"That there's a damned ticklish place to get any of the men to go late at night," said Maverick reflectively.

"Why so?"

"That place is harnted, ye know, by the man on the spotted horse."

"Oh, nonsense!" ejaculated Haight.

"It's a fact though; he rides up and down there once in a while, and I wouldn't want ter see him myself."

"Oh, hang your ghost!" said Haight, impatiently, "tell your men if they see it to shoot it."

"That wouldn't do no good," responded Maverick doggedly, "It's the sight of it brings bad luck, and sometimes death. There was a fellow here two years ago, he seen it one night, and the next day he was killed in the mines; they said the ghost had called him."

"Well," said Haight, rising, "It would be well if your ghost would only call Houston and Van Dorn some night; but I want you to do as I say, anyway."

Lyle, who had caught nearly every word of this conversation, now rose quickly and retreated to the kitchen, knowing she would there be safe from detection, and could also judge of their movements. Nothing further was said, however; Haight went stealthily up-stairs to his room, and Maverick, after cursing to himself a few moments, was soon snoring profoundly, and Lyle then returned to Miss Gladden's room. She felt a sickening sensation as she repeated the conversation to her friend, and realized all that it meant. Miss Gladden was inexpressibly shocked:

"Lyle, my dear child, is it possible that they would go to such extreme limits as that. I had thought that he would be in danger of some assault in the dark, or something of that kind, but to trap him in the mines! I never dreamed of anything so cowardly, so dastardly! He will be in constant danger in the performance of his daily round of duties."

"Dear Leslie," said Lyle,—for thus Miss Gladden had of late requested her to address her,—"I have told you, you did not realize what a place this is, and the worst of all is, that it is my father who is planning this, after all the kindness which you and Mr. Houston have shown me! What must you think of us?"

"Of you, my dear child? I love you and trust you the

same as ever," exclaimed Miss Gladden impulsively, "he is no father of yours!"

Lyle, in her grief, did not notice the import of Miss Gladden's words, but she exclaimed passionately:

"I will never call that man father again as long as I live, and if it ever comes to that, I will shoot him, rather than let him injure Mr. Houston." Then, a moment later, she added more calmly:

"I must not allow myself to become excited, I must think and plan. Do you know, I was so glad that they have not, as yet, found the real clue to what is going on, and do not even suspect the truth, and they must not be allowed even to surmise it; as long as they do not, Mr. Houston is comparatively safe, and they must not be allowed to watch him, or get any clue to his movements."

"But how can you prevent it, dear? You know the country and the people so much better than I, that you can plan and direct far better than I can; you command, dear Lyle, and you will find me ready to obey, afraid of nothing, not death itself, if I can only help him and save him from his enemies."

"You had better write a note to him to-night, to give him quietly in the morning, as you may not have an opportunity for a long talk with him so early, and tell him what I have told you. Then he can probably make arrangements with Jack by writing, so that he will not need to go to the cabin again at present; or, if necessary, I can go for him."

"But what will they do about their intended examination of the mines? They will surely be watched then."

"All they can do is to make their plans as quietly and secretly as possible, and then go prepared for the worst, but I think I can help them there; I have a scheme of my own, something that occurred to me while listening to their conversation, which I will tell you later."

The note was written, and it was nearly daylight, when the two at last retired, to rest possibly, but not to sleep.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

For the next ensuing days there were no more visits to the cabin. According to Lyle's suggestion, a few notes were quietly exchanged between Houston and Jack; thus their plans were maturing, while there was nothing which outsiders could detect.

Meanwhile, Haight had bestowed considerable attention upon Miss Araminta Bixby, to the unspeakable delight of that individual, and had so ingratiated himself into her favor that she only too gladly consented to play the part of spy on the movements of Houston and Van Dorn. The two Maverick boys had also agreed to report to him whatever they were able to learn concerning these two.

Houston and Van Dorn, however, did not seem quite so intimate of late. They were apparently as good friends as ever, but were not so frequently seen together. Nearly every evening, Van Dorn started out for a stroll, sometimes with Lyle, sometimes alone, often sauntering in the direction of the cabin, but never seen to enter; while Houston, after spending an hour or two with Miss Gladden, would walk down to the mines, and entering the various tunnels, or descending the shafts of one mine and another, would watch the night shift at their work, or inspect the workings, occasionally taking measurements here and there. On one of these trips Jack accompanied him, and on their return, they completed the arrangements for the visit to the Lucky Chance mine, the following night.

On the afternoon of the next day, Houston returned to the house a little earlier than usual, having finished his work for the day at the mines and mills, and as he with Miss Gladden and Lyle, sat in the little porch, they were joined a few moments later by Van Dorn. In low tones the plans for the evening were discussed.

"Of course," said Houston, "we shall go prepared for

trouble, but I do not anticipate that we shall meet with any. Even if we are watched, our course of procedure will differ so slightly from what we have followed for a week past, I think it will not excite suspicion."

"They have watched me so many evenings to no purpose, they may be off guard to-night," said Van Dorn.

"Don't flatter yourself that you will escape 'Minty's' espionage for a single night," replied Lyle, "she would remain out all night watching you to gain a smile from Haight in the morning."

Van Dorn laughed. "So it is the charming Miss Bixby whose watchful eye is upon me!" he exclaimed, "I think I will have to enter the lists as Haight's rival, and see if I cannot win such faithful devotion upon the right side."

"After you are gone," said Lyle, "I will soon be able to tell whether there will be men sent out to watch you to-night; and I shall act accordingly," she added, with a smile at Miss Gladden.

"Why, Miss Maverick, what will you do?" inquired Van Dorn, "you must not expose yourself in any way."

"I will be in no danger," she answered smiling.

"I have no idea what Lyle intends to do," said Houston, "but I have great confidence in her plans, for she knows this class of people better than we, and I have found her judgment to be relied upon, on every occasion so far."

Lyle's beautiful eyes spoke her thanks for his words of appreciation, as she asked:

"At what hour will you have completed the examination, and be ready to leave the mine?"

"Probably very near twelve o'clock," Houston replied, "we cannot accomplish our work much before that time, and I do not wish to be out much later."

"Well," said Lyle, merrily, but with a slightly mysterious air, "if you are out at that hour, you may see the phantom horse and his rider."

"Why, how is that?" inquired Van Dorn wonderingly, while Houston remarked:

"If we see nothing more than phantoms, we shall be very happily disappointed."

"All right," she responded, "if the ghost walks to-night, don't be surprised," and hearing some one enter the dining room to make preparations for the evening meal, she left them, and the subject of conversation changed immediately.

A few hours later, Houston started as usual for the mines. There was nothing out of the ordinary course of affairs in this, except that the leave-taking between him and Leslie was unusually tender, but of this no one knew but themselves. A little earlier, Van Dorn had left for his customary stroll, giving Lyle an invitation to accompany him, which she declined on the plea of being very busy. She immediately withdrew to the kitchen, and smiled to herself presently, as she saw Minty, with an air of great importance, starting out in the same direction. She had been gone about half an hour, when Lyle, who was again seated in the porch, caught sight of her moon-shaped face peering around the corner of the house in frantic endeavors to attract Haight's attention. As he was facing in almost an opposite direction, her efforts were unavailing, and Lyle, who could with difficulty restrain a smile, added to her embarrassment by inquiring in the blandest tones:

"What is it, Araminta? do you wish to see me?"

At the mention of her name, Haight turned suddenly, just as the blushing Miss Bixby was stammering out his name, and catching his eye, she began nodding vigorously, to signify the importance of her errand.

For once, Haight's punctilious suavity upon which he prided himself, deserted him, and exclaiming, partly in anger, and partly as a blind, "Confound it! what does the fool want of me?" he disappeared around the house, while Lyle exchanged glances with Miss Gladden, and the in-offensive young bookkeeper, recently imported from Silver City, looked on in mute astonishment.

At the kitchen door, Haight found his agent and spy, her face shining with delight that she at last had some news to impart.

"He's went in there to-night, Mr. Haight," she cried breathlessly, "I seen him; I've watched him every night, but he's never went in till to-night."

"You fool!" exclaimed Haight, angrily, "why couldn't you come around and give me the tip on the quiet, instead of standing there grimacing like an idiot, making a fool of yourself and me, too? Where are the boys?"

Such a greeting was too much for Minty, after her faithfulness; her anger was too great even for words, she was speechless and without deigning even a look at Haight, she went into the house, and rushing to her room, burst into a storm of tears, vowing then and there, between her sobs, that she would tell Mr. Van Dorn every word that Haight had said about him.

Meanwhile, Lyle, from her post of observation in the kitchen, saw Haight call Jim Maverick out from among a group of miners who had congregated for an evening's visit, and after a few words, Maverick signaled to one of the miners, who, with his two companions, came over and joined them. A few moments later the three started down the road, and Lyle heard Haight's final instructions to them:

"Get onto what those fellows are about, if you have to stay till morning, and if you want any help, send Jake back."

She knew the men; they were cruel and treacherous, and she was confident that they were well armed, but they were at the same time, cowards, and returning to Miss Gladden, she whispered:

"I shall try my little experiment to-night, and I do not believe there will be any trouble."

It was quite dark when the men who had been sent to watch for Van Dorn reached the little cabin. A lamp was burning within, as could be told by the lines of light around the edge of the dark shade at the window, but beyond this, there was neither sign nor sound. Having assured themselves that there was no way by which they could ascertain what was going on within, the men sat down behind a little clump of evergreens, and filling their pipes, prepared to await developments. Scarcely had they done so, however, when the light suddenly went out.

"What the devil do they think they're givin' us?" said one of the men, with an oath.

"They seen us mos' likely, and they're tryin' to fool us that there's nobody there."

"They can't play no such trick on us as that, damn 'em," said the first speaker, but at that instant the cabin door opened, and two figures came out. The men sprang quickly to their feet, making no sound, and listening intently. They heard the lock click in the door, and Jack's voice bidding Rex take care of the house, to which he barked in reply; and then came Mike's broad voice:

"The saints presarve us! but the baste knows more than mony a mon, I'm afther thinkin'."

"That he does," replied Jack, "and he is far more faithful."

The men, astonished, slunk back into the brush, their keen eyes watching every movement of the two as they passed; there was no mistaking those figures, or the rough clothes which they wore; it was Jack and Mike, and their powerful muscle was too well known throughout the camp, for any man, even the most brutal, to have the slightest wish to tackle either of them.

As Jack and his companion passed out of hearing, the men dropped to the ground, and for a moment the air resounded with their profanity, while they held a brief consultation.

"They've tricked us, and that feller's hidin' 'round here," said the leader, "or else he went on ahead to the mines; he hadn't no time to go back to the house, for we'd 'a met 'im. There's somethin' in the wind to-night," he added with an oath, "and I'm goin' to find out what 'tis. You fellers git after them two and keep 'em in sight; the boss is down there, and mebbe the other feller, too; if ye see 'im, send Jake to me, and I'll come 'round there and we'll lay for 'em. If he ain't there, he's here, hidin' somewhere, and I'll watch and settle his hash for 'im all right when he does show up."

"We'd better git some more of the boys," said Jake, "if we're goin' to tackle them fellers with Jack and Mike along; that ain't no kind of a job I'm hankerin' after."

"You damned fool!" said the first speaker, "who's said anything 'bout Jack and Mike? They'll come back the way they've went, and them others will start up the



canyon for the house, and if we three can't hold 'em up, my name ain't Pete Brody; now git!"

Jack and his partner had met Houston in the Yankee Boy mine. As they emerged from the shaft a little later, the piercing eyes of Jack and Houston caught a glimpse of two figures skulking among the rocks at a distance. Van Dorn was at a slight disadvantage, being somewhat near-sighted, and having been obliged to take off his glasses when donning Mike's costume.

"I know them," said Jack, "they are two of the three that were outside the cabin, and one of them is about the biggest coward that breathes; we could dispose of a regiment of such men, but I prefer to get along without trouble if we can."

They started for the other mine, Houston taking the lead and Van Dorn following, while Jack brought up the rear.

"They are following us," said Jack, after two or three quick glances behind him, "but at a distance; we will probably have a nearer view of them later, when we leave the mine."

As they proceeded through the tunnel of the Lucky Chance mine, they met very few of the miners; they touched their caps to Houston with a sort of sullen civility, and greeted his companions with rough jests, which Jack received with his usual taciturn manner, but to which Van Dorn, from underneath his disguise, responded with bits of Irish blarney and wit, which greatly amused his associates.

Meanwhile, Pete Brody, as he kept his solitary watch before the cabin, was surprised by the sudden return of Jake.

"Have ye found 'im?" he inquired eagerly, "Is he down there with the boss?"

"No, he's not there."

"Then, what in hell are you back here for?"

"Bud sent me," answered Jake; "he said to tell ye they've gone into the Lucky Chance, and what do ye be thinkin' o' that?"

"The Lucky Chance!" exclaimed Pete, "then there's some diviltry a goin' sure, for the old man, he don't let

nobody into that mine 'thout he's along; and if that Van-what's-his-name ain't down there he's right here, that's all, and here I stays."

"And me and Bud, we're to watch out for the boss?"

"Yes, lay for 'im and overhaul 'im, and find out what the devil is goin' on."

"I guess he's a pretty tough feller to handle, from all I've heerd," remarked Jake reflectively.

Pete responded with an oath. "Knock 'im silly, he'll be easy 'nough handlin' then."

"Ye don't mean for to do 'im up, do ye Pete?"

"Well, I guess nobody'd feel very bad if ye did."

Jake went down the road, and Pete was alone once more. After waiting a while, he determined to ascertain, if possible, whether there was any one within the cabin. As he approached the door, there was a low savage growl from the faithful watcher within. Very stealthily he tried to open the door, but it was locked, and in response there was such a furious onset upon the other side, accompanied by such fierce growls, that he started back involuntarily.

It was nearly twelve o'clock, and Pete was growing desperate, and anxious to put an end to his long watch. He retreated to the road, and stood looking at the cabin, trying to decide whether he should break in the window and shoot the dog, and run the risk of being shot in return by whoever might be concealed within, when his attention was suddenly arrested by a strange sound, as of heavily muffled footsteps close behind him. He turned quickly, and in the starlight beheld a sight that seemed to chill the blood in his veins. Not more than fifty feet distant, and slowly approaching him, were the spotted horse and his ghostly rider.

Every detail was perfect, like the description he had often heard given by others who had seen the frightful apparition: the man dressed in his miner's clothes, carrying the empty bag from which the gold had been stolen; his face ghastly white, and the blood streaming from his breast, while horse and rider were partially shrouded by a white covering which floated from behind them.

Nearer and nearer came those strange footsteps, closer and closer the fearful sight, and still Pete stood, as if

nearest to where his toes sticking from their sockets, his feet being, but unable to move or speak.

Suddenly a long low groan issuing from the ghastly ign seemed to shake the wall, and with one stride the old, ~~the~~ ~~ghost~~ ~~man~~, it ~~then~~ ~~leaped~~ out of the road, and ran on his life, jumping and leaping over the rocks and through the brush, like a wild man.

The ghost gave a low, rattling laugh of satisfaction, and turning the corner, rode rapidly back in the direction from which it had come, until reaching the spot from the house to the mines, where the horse halted briefly for some distance, but on leaving the mines, once more resumed his homeward pace.

The two men concealed in the brush along the road had no warning of the approaching phantom, until they caught the sound of the strange footsteps, and peered cautiously out, only to see the fearful sight that Pete beheld shortly before.

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed Jake, with a yell, "it's the ghost!" The men jumped simultaneously into the road, and started for the miners' quarters, screaming like maniacs. The ghost followed in swift pursuit until they were some distance past the mines; the men then being safely disposed of with no danger of their return, it turned slowly in the direction of the Lucky Chance mine.

Houston and his friends, having accomplished their task, stepped forth from the tunnel into the starlight, looking carefully and searchingly in every direction.

"There is no one to be seen at present," said Houston in low tones, "they may be concealed about here, or we may meet them on the road to the house."

"Very probably," Jack replied, "we must now proceed with the utmost caution. Mr. Van Dorn and I will accompany you to the house, and he had better then go with me to the cabin, in case there should be spies watching for our return, and it will be safer for him to remain there until nearly daylight, as none of the men will be out at that time, and he can return to the house unobserved."

They had gone but a short distance, however, when, passing around a curve in the road, they beheld a sight that filled them with astonishment.

"Shades of the departed!" exclaimed Houston, "what kind of an apparition is this?"

Jack studied the approaching figures for an instant, a smile of amusement lighting up his usually stern features, while Van Dorn hastily slipped on his glasses for a better view.

"That," said Jack, "is evidently the famous phantom of Spotted Horse gulch, but who has originated the idea?"

"It must be Lyle," said Houston, "she said the ghost would walk to-night."

"Well, by George!" exclaimed Van Dorn, "that is pretty good anyway."

Slowly the ghost approached, giving the interested observers an opportunity to note the details of the make-up; the ghastly face, the heavy beard of dark colored wool, the narrow strips of red flannel streaming from breast and side, and even the heavy woolen socks upon the horse's feet, muffling the sound of his steps. Suddenly the slouch hat was raised, and the shining eyes of Lyle looked out from the strange disguise, as she announced in triumphant tones:

"The road is clear, and you are safe!"

"Lyle," said Houston, "how did you ever think of this? Did you devise this masquerade?"

"The idea was mine," she answered, "it occurred to me the other night while listening to their talk, but Miss Gladden helped me to carry it out."

"And was it a success?" asked Van Dorn wonderingly, having more practical knowledge of mines than of miners, "Were the men frightened?"

"You would have thought so, could you have seen Pete Brody," Lyle replied, with a low laugh, "I believe he is running yet, and I wouldn't be surprised if Jake has lost what few wits he ever possessed."

"It was one of the best schemes that could have been devised," said Jack, gravely, adding, "We probably owe you more than we know."

Quietly and safely the little party proceeded up the winding road, and having reached their several destinations, all were soon at rest. Even the spotted horse, securely stabled in his accustomed place, gravely munched

his wisp of hay without a thought of the ghostly escapade in which he had borne so prominent a part.

But in the miners' quarters consternation reigned, as Pete and Bud related their experiences, Jake being utterly incapacitated for speech. Even to Jack and Van Dorn, Mike had a fearful tale to tell of the sight he had witnessed, while alone with Rex in the cabin, and it was some time before his perturbed Irish fancies could be soothed; and "the night that the ghost walked," was one long remembered and frequently recalled by many of the denizens of the little mining camp.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

After the events leading up to the examination of the Lucky Chance mine, it was considered best for a while to pursue very nearly the same line of conduct that had been followed for the last ten days, carefully avoiding any abrupt change which might attract attention. All necessary data had now been secured, and Houston felt that he could better afford to remain quiet for a brief time and reconnoiter the situation, than by any hasty move to excite further suspicion at the present time.

At the breakfast table the next morning, however, the thoughts of all present were partially diverted into different channels, by the arrival of a telegram for Houston which proved to be a message from Ned Rutherford, to the effect that he and his brother were on their way to Silver City, and would be at the mining camp within the next twenty-four or thirty-six hours.

Haight had been exceedingly angry on learning from Maverick, early in the morning, of the failure of the men to report anything definite concerning the movements of those whom they had been sent out to watch. He had accomplished nothing, and was uncertain what course next to pursue, and he too, decided to remain quiet for the present. He continued to watch Houston and Van Dorn, his ugly suspicions only half concealed by the smiling exterior which he tried to assume. He had hastened to

make peace with Minty, as he feared the results which might follow should his plottings become known to Houston, not dreaming that the latter had woven such a web around, not the mining company alone, but including also its principal employes, that in remaining where he was, a fate far worse than his fears awaited him.

During the day, Miss Gladden and Lyle busied themselves with preparations for the expected guests. A room on the ground floor, adjoining and connecting with the one occupied by Houston and Van Dorn, and with a view of the lake and cascades, was put in readiness; and books, sketches and bric-a-brac contributed by Houston and Miss Gladden, and tastefully arranged by Lyle, relieved the blank walls and plain furniture, and made the place look quite attractive.

Houston was jubilant over the information acquired by their expedition of the previous night; nothing out of the usual course occurred that day, and returning earlier from his customary visit to the mines than he had done of late, the remainder of the evening was devoted to music and song.

After Miss Gladden and Lyle had gone up-stairs, they sat for some time talking over the events of the last few days, and anticipating the coming of Rutherford and his brother on the morrow. Many were Miss Gladden's surmises regarding the stranger, and Lyle then learned for the first time that he was an intimate friend of Houston's.

"Everard tells me that though Ned is a pleasant fellow and good hearted, yet he is not in the least like his brother. He says Morton, as he always calls him, is a most perfect gentleman in every sense of the word, and a scholar of rare intellectual attainments, fond of scientific research, and a brilliant writer."

"I judged from his picture that the two brothers were very unlike," said Lyle, "and from your description he will be in many respects a new specimen to come under my limited observation; I will have to make a study of him, and see if he is at all like my idea of a literary person. I would not suppose, though, there would be much to interest him here; the only rarities he will find are possibly new phases of ignorance and coarseness and crime."

Miss Gladden thought, as she looked at Lyle, that if the new-comer did not find rare beauty of mind and soul, as well as of form and face, in that secluded region, he certainly must be very unappreciative; but she only said:

"You seem to have forgotten what Ned said of his brother, that his love of the beautiful was so intense, he doubted whether he would ever want to leave the scenery and surroundings here."

"That was simply one of Mr. Rutherford's extravagant expressions," Lyle replied, "the natural surroundings here are certainly beautiful, but their beauty only makes the conditions mentally and morally the more painfully conspicuous, and if I can see the contrast so plainly, who have always lived here and known no other life, how must it look to one such as he!"

"Why do you always insist upon it so strongly that you have never known any other life than this?" inquired Miss Gladden.

"Why?" asked Lyle, in surprise, "I suppose simply because it is a fact, the one hateful truth that I despise, and so I say it over and over to myself, to check these foolish dream-fancies of mine, that seem as if I had known something better sometime."

Lyle spoke with more bitterness than Miss Gladden had ever heard before, and the latter answered gently:

"If I were in your place, Lyle dear, I would not try to check these fancies; I would encourage them."

Lyle gazed at her friend in astonishment. "Encourage them!" she repeated, "I don't understand your meaning, why would you advise that?"

"To see to what they would lead, my dear." Then, as Lyle looked bewildered, she continued:

"Did it never occur to you, Lyle, that these fancies, as you call them, might possibly be an effort on the part of memory to recall something, long ago forgotten?"

"I never thought of such a possibility," she replied, slowly.

Miss Gladden threw one arm about her caressingly.

"If these were mere fancies why should they occur so persistently, and why should there be this sense of familiarity, of which you have spoken, with other and far dif-

ferent associations than these, unless there is some distinct image hidden away in the recesses of your brain, which your mind is trying to recall?"

Lyle had grown very pale; she had caught the idea which Miss Gladden was trying to convey, and her form trembled, while her lips and delicate nostrils quivered with suppressed agitation.

"Leslie," she cried, "do you mean that you think it possible there is any reality in it,—that I have ever known a different life from this,—a life anything like that which seems to come back to me?"

"I think it not only possible, but probable," said her friend, drawing the trembling girl closer to herself, "and that is why I want you to encourage these impressions, and see if you will not, after a time, be able to recall the past more definitely."

"But why do you believe this?" questioned Lyle, "How did you ever think of it?"

"When you first told me of your fancies, as you called them, and of your dreams, constantly recurring since your earliest childhood, I felt that they must be produced by something that had really occurred, some time in the past, but perhaps so long ago that only the faintest impression was left upon your mind; but however faint, to me it seemed proof that the reality had existed. The more I have questioned you, the more I have become convinced of this, and I find I am not alone in my opinion."

"Have you talked with Jack, and does he think as you do?" Lyle questioned. Miss Gladden answered in the affirmative.

"Is that the reason he has asked me so often regarding my early life?"

"Yes, he has questioned you, hoping you might be able to recall something of those years which you say seem to you only a blank. We can only surmise regarding your early life, but if you could recall some slight incident, or some individual, it might prove whether our surmises were correct." Then, as Lyle remained silent, Miss Gladden continued:

"That face which you always see in your dreams, must



be the face of some one you have really seen and known."

"Yes," Lyle answered dreamily, "I have often thought of that, and have tried to remember when, or where, it could have been."

For a few moments, both were silent; Lyle, in her abstraction, loosened her hair, and it fell around her like a veil of fine-spun gold. An idea suddenly occurred to Miss Gladden, and rising from her chair, she gathered up the golden mass, and began to rearrange and fasten it, Lyle scarcely heeding her action, so absorbed was she in thought.

When she had completed her work, she looked critically at Lyle for a moment, and seeming satisfied with the result, asked her to look in the glass. Half mechanically, Lyle did as requested, but at the first glance at the face reflected there, she uttered a low cry, and stood as if transfixed. Miss Gladden had arranged her hair in a style worn nearly twenty years before, and in imitation of the photograph which Jack had shown her. The effect was magical, as it showed Lyle's face to be an exact counterpart of the beautiful pictured face.

To Lyle it revealed much more, for to her astonished gaze there was brought back, with life-like distinctness and realism, the face of her dreams; the one which she had seen bending tenderly over her since her earliest recollection, and which had seemed so often to comfort her in the days of her childish griefs when she had sobbed herself to sleep.

Suddenly, Miss Gladden saw the face in the glass grow deathly white, and Lyle, quickly turning toward her friend, exclaimed:

"I see it now! That is my mother's face that I have seen in my dreams! And I have seen it living some time, somewhere, but not here. These people are not my parents; I am no child of theirs. Oh, Leslie, tell me, is this true?"

Very gently Miss Gladden soothed the excited girl, telling her that while her friends knew nothing as yet, for a certainty, regarding her parentage, they felt that she, in her early life, had had a home and surroundings far differ-

ent from those she knew here, and that they hoped ere long, with her help, to arrive at the whole truth.

"But how did I ever come to live here with these people?" inquired Lyle, a new fear dawning in her eyes, "do you suppose they were hired to take me?"

"No, never," said Miss Gladden, "as nearly as we can judge, you must have been stolen."

"And do you think my own parents are now living?" she asked.

So far as she was able to do so, Miss Gladden explained the situation, as Jack had told it to her, making no reference, however, to what he had said regarding the possibility of Lyle's friends coming to the mountains, where they would be likely to recognize her. Of this, Miss Gladden herself understood so little, she thought best not to allude to it now.

"But why has Jack never told me of this, and of my mother? He must have known her," said Lyle.

"You must remember, dear, that he had no proof that any such relation really existed; as I understood him, he with others, supposed that this child was not living, but he was struck with the resemblance between you and the mother of this child, and the relationship occurred to him at first as the merest possibility, but grew almost to a certainty, as the resemblance between you increased; and yet, you can see that under the circumstances, while you were under the control and in the power of these people, it would not be best to say anything until he had some proof as to your identity."

"I see," Lyle answered, thoughtfully, "but now that I remember her as my mother, do you suppose that he would talk with me about her, or help me to find my true relatives?"

"I hardly know how to answer you," said Miss Gladden slowly, "there is some mystery about it all, dear, that I do not understand; he might perhaps talk more freely with you, but with me he appeared willing to say very little regarding your mother, or your friends. Still, he gave me a hint, so vague and shadowy I scarcely understood it, but to the effect that he thought there might, before

long, be an opportunity for a meeting between you and those whom he believed to be your friends."

"Well," said Lyle, after a pause, "Jack is a true friend to me, he knows what is best, and I can afford to wait with even such a possibility to look forward to. I will not wait in idleness either, I shall try to find some clue, some evidence as to who I really am, and something tells me I will succeed." Then she added tenderly, "Do you know, I believe, whoever my mother may have been, Jack must have loved her."

"She certainly was very dear to him," replied Miss Gladden.

They talked till far into the morning hours, and as they finally separated for the night, Lyle approached her friend, and throwing her arms about her neck, she exclaimed, almost in tears:

"Oh, Leslie, you can never know how glad I am that you have shown me this, and shown it to me to-night! I have felt so disgraced, so degraded by the life here, it seemed as if I were a part of it all, a part of my own hateful surroundings but now, I know I am not; now," she continued, lifting her head proudly and raising her arms slowly with a beautiful gesture, "they can fetter me no longer! The chains that have held me so long and so cruelly are already bursting; even now, I can rise above them; soon, I shall be free!"

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

Do coming events cast their shadows before? Did the silently-waving pinions of the angel who "troubled the waters" give any hint of his beneficent approach? However that may be, certain it is that on the morning of the day in which the hitherto untroubled depths of Lyle's womanly nature were to be stirred by the mightiest of influences, there came to her a prescience, thrilling and vibrating through her whole being, that this day was to be the crisis, the turning point of her life. On that day, she was to meet one whose influence upon her own life

she felt would be far greater than that of any human being she could recall.

Lyle was not in love. As yet, she knew nothing of what love might be, but she possessed rare depth of feeling. In her lonely, secluded life, she had known few emotions, but those few were deep and lasting; and when, a few months before, she had incidentally seen the photograph of Morton Rutherford,—only one among many, all unknown to her,—it had left an impression upon her heart and brain, never to be effaced.

His was no ordinary face; it would attract the most casual observer, and to one gifted with Lyle's wonderful insight and perception, and possessing her fine susceptibilities, there would be revealed such rare strength and beauty of mind and character combined, that, once seen, it might not be easily forgotten.

To Lyle, in her isolation, it seemed a glimpse of a kindred soul, and she had often wondered what the living face itself might be, and what acquaintance and friendship with such a soul might mean. She had looked forward to his coming to the camp with mingled pleasure and dread. She thoroughly understood the position which she held in the estimation of the younger Mr. Rutherford; would his brother regard her with the same half pitying, half patronizing admiration? Would her narrow, restricted life seem so small and poor to him, with his superior attainments, that he would altogether ignore her? Or would he be able, like Mr. Houston and Miss Gladden, to overlook her hateful and hated environment, and help her rise above it?

These were the questions which for the past few weeks had perplexed and troubled her; but the revelation which had come to her on the previous night had changed the whole current of her thought. What matter now, how mean or debasing her surroundings, since no taint from them could attach itself to her? What matter if her life had been cramped and restricted, since she was soon to rise above it into the life for which she had been created? Perhaps her natural sphere was not, after all, so unlike that in which her friends moved, to which even he was accustomed, the stranger, whose coming she now antici-

pated with a strange, unaccountable thrill of expectation. Would he, with that wonderful power which she felt he possessed, to elevate or to crush the souls with whom he came in contact, would he recognize her true sphere, as her other friends had done, or would he be blinded by her surroundings?

She could not rest; she rose and looked forth upon the glorious dawn of the new day, and was impressed as never before, with the beauty of the vision which met her eyes. To her, it seemed like the dawning of a new epoch in her life; nay, more than that, like the dawning of a new life itself.

Impatient of restraint, she left the house, and went out into the morning fresh from the hand of the Creator, as yet undefiled by contact with human life. Hastily climbing a series of rocky ledges, she reached a broad plateau, and looked about her. The life which she had so hated and despised seemed suddenly to have dropped forever out of sight, and she was conscious only of a new beauty, a new glory surrounding her.

The mountains, blushing in the first rosy light, lifted their gleaming, glory-crowned spires heavenward; the cascades chanted in thunderous, yet rhythmic tones, their unceasing anthem of praise, their snow-white spray ascending skyward, like clouds of incense, while the little flowers, clinging to rock and ledge and mountain-side, turned their sweet faces upward in silent adoration. The place seemed pervaded by a spirit of universal adoration and praise, and instinctively, Lyle bowed her head in silent worship; and as she did so, there came to her, as though revealed by the lightning's flash, the vision of her mother kneeling beside her, in those dim days so long ago, clasping her tiny hands within her own, and teaching her baby lips to lisp the words of prayer.

For a long time she knelt in that temple made without hands, till mountain and valley were bathed in glorious sunlight; and when at last, she descended the rocky footpath, she felt, as she looked forth upon the new life opening before her, no fear, no shrinking, but strong to go forward and meet her destiny, whatever it might be.

All were impressed that morning by Lyle's manner,

the added dignity of bearing, the new expression that looked forth from her soulful eyes, though none but Miss Gladden understood the cause.

At the breakfast table, the final plans were made for the reception of the guests to arrive that day. Word had been received that they were already in Silver City, and would come out on the noon train. Houston had telegraphed to the Y for the best team there to be in readiness to bring them up to the camp, and an hour or so before noon, he and Van Dorn were to take two horses and ride to the Y to meet them, and accompany them on their ride up the canyon. A late dinner was to be served upon their arrival, when the two ladies would be present, as Lyle no longer acted in the capacity of waiter, Miss Gladden having some time before insisted that she should preside at the table, and the blushing Miss Bixby, after much painstaking effort, having been finally educated up to the point of performing that ceremony very creditably.

"Everard," said Miss Gladden after breakfast, as Houston stopped for his customary chat with her before starting out on his daily routine, "did you observe Lyle this morning? I never saw her look so lovely;" adding playfully, "I wonder you did not fall in love with her, she is far more beautiful than I."

"Allow me to be judge," he replied, "though I will admit that I think she grows more beautiful every day. But as to falling in love with her, I doubt if I would have done that even had I not met you. From the first she has seemed to me unaccountably like a sister; I cannot explain why, unless it was because of that child-like, almost appealing manner she had at that time. She has none of it now, however, she is developing very rapidly into a noble womanhood, and yet I still have the same feeling toward her, and I think she regards me as a brother."

"That is true," said Miss Gladden, "she cares for you more than for any of the others, but only, as you say, as a brother. Her heart does not seem to be very susceptible."

"She may be none the less susceptible," Houston re-

plied, "but she realizes her position here, and she is far too proud spirited to carry her heart upon her sleeve."

Miss Gladden then related to Houston the events of the preceding night, and Lyle's sudden recollection of her own mother. He was much interested.

"I am more than glad," he replied, "doubtless the memory of her early childhood will gradually come back to her, and we may be able to ascertain her true parentage. I hope so, at least, for I believe Maverick to be an out and out scoundrel, capable of any villainy, and I would like to see him brought to justice."

The room set apart for the expected guests, as well as the dining-room, was decorated with wild flowers and trailing vines, and in this pleasant employment, and the preparation of a few dainty dishes for the table, the forenoon passed swiftly.

The noon train had scarcely come to a stop at the little station at the Y, when Ned Rutherford was seen rushing impetuously from the car, his camera case as usual in one hand, at sight of which the two young men waiting on the platform burst into a hearty laugh.

"There he is," said Houston, "the same old Ned!"

"The very same old boy!" added Van Dorn, as they hastened to meet him.

"Hullo, Everard!" cried Ned, jumping upon the platform, "I say, but it seems mighty good to see you again! How are you, Van Dorn?"

"How are you, Ned?" said Van Dorn, extending his hand, "we wouldn't have known you if it hadn't been for that camera box of yours!"

"That so?" answered Ned, good-naturedly, "well, I always considered it indispensable, but I didn't suppose my identity would be lost without it."

Meanwhile, Houston had hastened to meet the elder brother, and it could readily be seen that they were more than ordinary friends.

"Everard, old fellow!" he exclaimed, in response to Houston's greeting, "this is the greatest pleasure I've had in many a day. I never dreamed that the Houston of whom Ned wrote such glowing accounts was my old friend."

"I used to think sometimes," said Houston, "when Ned was writing you, that I would like to send you some reminder of old times, a college password or signal that you would understand; but at that time, I didn't know Ned very well, and of course I was anxious to conceal my identity here."

"That was right," said the elder Rutherford, with a comical glance at his brother, "Ned is rather injudicious, he belongs to that unfortunate class of people, with the best of intentions, who usually succeed in doing as much mischief as others with the worst."

"Right you are there," said Ned, "I'm always putting my foot in it one way or another; I wouldn't advise anybody to make a confidant of me, I'd give them away sure. I say, Everard," he continued, while his brother and Van Dorn exchanged cordial greetings, "how are you getting on, and how is the Buncombe-Boomerang combination?"

"We have been very successful so far, everything is nearly in readiness, and the combination as you call it, cannot exist much longer; we will give you full particulars later."

"And how are the ladies?" Ned inquired further.

"They are well, and waiting to give you and your brother a royal welcome."

"Thank you," Morton Rutherford replied, "I am quite anxious to meet them, Ned, of course, can speak for himself."

"That he can, and generally does when the right time comes," responded that individual, "you will find I am a universal favorite here, in the camp of the Philistines."

In a little while they were on their way to camp, Houston and Morton Rutherford occupying the back seat of the light, canopy-top wagon, while Van Dorn and Ned took the forward seat with the driver, the horses and baggage following with one of the mining teams.

Morton Rutherford gave his friend a glowing account of his journey through the west, dwelling at considerable length on his enjoyment of the scenic routes. As they wound upward through the canyon, he grew ecstatic over the wild beauty and rugged grandeur extending in every direction, and when they finally drew rein be-



fore the long, low boarding house, nestling at the foot of the mountain, with its rustic, vine-covered porch, and surrounded on all sides by the wild scenery of that region, his admiration knew no bounds.

"What a delightful retreat!" he exclaimed, "what a study for an artist!"

Within the porch, among the vines, the ladies awaited their coming, and Lyle, looking forth from her shady retreat, saw the face whose image had been imprinted on heart and brain, and at a glance she read all she had expected to find, and more. There were the fine features, expressing such depth and power, and yet such delicacy of thought and feeling, the intellectual brow, the dark, expressive eyes, all as she had seen them in the picture; but what picture could convey the living beauty of the whole? It was the face of one whom women would worship, and men would follow even to death.

The gentlemen approached the house, Houston and his friend leading the way. Miss Gladden advanced to meet them, and as Houston introduced Mr. Rutherford, she extended to him a most gracious and graceful welcome, and also to Ned. Her gown was white, of soft, clinging material, trimmed with quantities of rich, rare lace, and brightened here and there with touches of crimson and gold. She wore a few costly jewels, and the diamond hilt of a tiny dagger glistened and scintillated in her auburn-tinted hair. She looked very beautiful, and as Mr. Rutherford paused to respond to her welcome with a few courteous words, he thought his friend was surely to be congratulated on the prize he had won.

Meanwhile, Ned had discovered Lyle, as she stood partially hidden among the vines, awaiting her turn, and hastened to greet her in his impetuous fashion.

"How do you do, Miss Maverick? I'm awfully glad to see you. I want you to know my brother," and his cheerful voice sounded on his brother's ear, as he replied to some remark of Miss Gladden's.

"Morton, I want to introduce you to our nightingale; Miss Maverick, allow me to make you acquainted with my brother."

With a rare smile lighting up his face, Morton Ruther-

ford turned toward the speaker, and as he did so, saw a vision of the most royal young womanhood his eyes had ever beheld. She, too, was dressed in white, but it was a filmy, cloud-like mass, with trimmings of ethereal blue. She wore no jewels, but a crown of golden hair gleamed like a coronet above her head, and her delicately molded face had a spirituelle beauty and radiance unlike any living face he had ever seen, and which he could only compare to the exquisite Madonna faces, painted by artists of the old world, and of the olden time.

And Lyle, coming forward with unconscious, queenly grace, looked for an instant into that face whose subtle power she already felt, her wondrous, starry eyes, luminous with a new, strange light, meeting his with their depth of meaning, their powerful magnetism, and from that brief instant, life for each was changed, wholly and completely; whether for good or ill, for weal or woe, neither as yet could say.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was a very congenial little company that somewhat later gathered about the dinner table. There were no outsiders present on this occasion to check their conversation, and the room resounded with merry laughter as the young men related various reminiscences of their college days, or as Lyle gave her eastern friends some amusing glimpses of western life.

Morton Rutherford added his share to the general enjoyment, as he gave in an inimitable manner which fascinated his listeners, sketches of places and people he had met in his western journey; but a close observer would have noticed that his dark eyes often wandered to the face of the fair hostess, presiding at the table with such dignity, and his thoughts much of the time were far removed from the subject of conversation.

Of the strange, wild tumult in Lyle's breast there was no token, save in her heightened color, and the added brilliancy of her eyes.

The plain, but wholesome mountain fare disappeared rapidly before the appetites sharpened by the bracing air of that altitude, and still the little company lingered at the table, loath to tear themselves away.

Plans were made for a few days and evenings of genuine enjoyment, before proceeding any further with the business in which all were so deeply interested. Houston and Van Dorn would of course be more or less confined by their work, and it was voted that, during the day, Mr. Rutherford should be entertained by the ladies, or, as the hunting and fishing season had now opened, he and Ned would be able to find considerable sport in the surrounding country. But the evenings were to be spent by the entire party in visits to the different points of interest and beauty already familiar to some of their number.

"And one of the first places to visit," said Ned Rutherford, at this point in the conversation, "will be the cascades; we will go out there in boats, you know, with the guitar and violin, and have music just as we did the first time we ever went out. Great Scott! but I never will forget that night as long as I live!"

"With the ladies' approval, that will be one of our first trips," said Houston.

"You play and sing, do you not, Mr. Rutherford?" Miss Gladden inquired, addressing the elder brother.

"Yes, occasionally," he answered, with a peculiar smile.

"What instrument do you use?"

"I can accompany myself on several different instruments," he replied, "but the violin is my favorite; it is capable of more expression than most others."

At last the little party adjourned to the porch, and Lyle, under the pretext of some household duties, excused herself, and escaped to her own little room. Here her forced composure gave way, and her highly wrought feelings found relief in a passionate burst of tears, though why she wept, she could not have told.

Unconsciously to herself, perhaps, Morton Rutherford had of late become the hero of her thoughts, partially on account of her high estimate of him, and also because of the sympathy which she felt would exist between them in taste and thought and feeling. She had dreamed

of a friendship with him, perhaps more perfect and helpful than any she had yet known; but they had met, and in that one glance had been revealed to her a natural affinity deeper than any of which she had ever dreamed, and the impossibility of a calm, Platonic friendship between kindred spirits such as theirs.

Unconsciously to herself, Lyle had that day crossed the great divide, and womanhood, with its dower of love and joy, of pain and suffering, was henceforth hers. The mightiest element in her nature, which had lain dormant all these years, its power unsuspected even by herself, was now aroused, and even while she felt the throbbing of its new life, as yet, she knew not its name. She was young, her observation and her experience had been limited, and there had been no one to prepare her for the certain awakening of this mighty power, before whose conquering sway all else must yield.

She grew more calm, and as she reviewed the few friendships she had known,—the helpful kindness and tenderness of Jack in whom she had confided her childish griefs, the chivalry of Everard Houston, who from the first had constituted himself her champion and protector, and even the pleasant kindliness of Ned Rutherford, whom she scarcely deemed more than an acquaintance,—there was suddenly revealed to her quickened perception the distinction between friendship and love, and instantly she recognized the stranger who had taken possession of her heart: Love had come. Love was to be henceforth king, and she stood trembling and abashed in the presence of the new sovereign. Her tears flowed silently, but she was far from unhappy; love, even unknown and unreciprocated, brings its own sweet reward.

Whether her love would ever be returned by the one whose glance had awakened it in its might, she dared not even think. She knew not, as yet, in what light he would regard her. Notwithstanding the friendship and esteem manifested by the younger brother, she fully understood the insurmountable barrier which his pride had placed between himself and her. Would it exist in the mind of the elder brother also? Or would his keener insight, his

superior perception discern her true position? Time alone would tell.

A little later, calm and queenly as ever, Lyle rejoined the little group, who had strolled out a short distance from the house, and were seated beside the lake, in the cooling shadow of a large rock.

She could not help observing the smile of pleasure with which Mr. Rutherford welcomed her approach, but she would not yet trust herself to hold any protracted conversation with him, and giving him only a bright little smile of recognition, she seated herself beside Ned, and began a playful badinage, as they had been accustomed to banter each other on his former visit. Morton Rutherford watched them curiously, listening to the war of words with a half smile, and evidently absorbed in his own thoughts, as, for a while, Miss Gladden and Mr. Van Dorn had the conversation to themselves, Houston having gone to the mines.

As the shadows began to lengthen, and the sun seemed hovering over a snow-crowned peak that stood out boldly against the western horizon, Houston was seen approaching the house, and at a little distance, Maverick and his two sons. Lyle, who was then standing on the outer edge of the group, talking with Miss Gladden, was quick to observe a sudden movement on Ned's part, as, turning toward his brother, he made some brief remark in low tones, regarding the approaching trio. She well knew the tenor of his remark, and watched closely to see its effect.

She saw Morton Rutherford glance in the direction indicated by a slight motion of Ned's head, and then, though he betrayed no surprise by word or movement, an expression of astonishment crossed his face, but only for an instant. His features grew white and stern, and he watched every movement of the three figures, as, with stealthy, slouching gait and suspicious looks, they stole around the corner of the house, and the expression of his eye seemed to Lyle like that of a judge passing sentence on a condemned criminal.

He did not look at Lyle immediately, perhaps he was conscious of the eyes watching him so narrowly from

under the heavily drooping lids, fringed with long, golden lashes, but when he did look toward her, there was a depth of meaning in those dark eyes which she could not fathom.

Twenty-four hours before, Lyle standing there, under those circumstances, would have been crushed with humiliation, but in the light of the revelation of the night before, she met his glance with an expression which to him seemed utterly inscrutable. There was neither shame nor apology written on her face, as with a calm, bright smile, and the same self-possessed manner, she turned and passed into the house.

Upon entering the dining-room, Lyle heard angry words in the kitchen, and paused to listen. The voice was Maverick's.

"Who in hell is that new feller you've got up here?"

"That's the brother of the young feller that was here a spell ago," answered the voice of Minty, who was just emerging from the pantry.

"Damn you! who asked you to say anything? Git out of here," he roared, and Minty made a hasty retreat into the cellar.

"Who's that new feller out there?" he again demanded of his wife.

"His name is Rutherford, and he's a brother of the young man that come out here with Mr. Houston," was her reply.

"What's his business here?"

"I guess he hain't got none, he seems to be out here for pleasure like his brother."

"Pleasure!" growled Maverick, with an oath, "there's too many of 'em, damn 'em, out here for pleasure; I'd give some of 'em some pleasure that they ain't a lookin' for, if I had a chance."

His wife made no response.

"What's that girl Lyle tricked out in such finery for?" he next asked.

"They're clothes that Miss Gladden give her," Mrs. Maverick replied, "and it saves us jest so much, so you needn't growl; besides she looks nice."

"Looks nice!" said Maverick, contemptuously, "you're

always bound to stick up for her! Look here, old woman," he added, in a lower tone, but which Lyle could hear, "have you been tellin' that girl anything? She don't own me for her daddy lately, I notice; now, if you've been puttin' her or anybody else onto anything of the kind, I can tell you you'll be damned sorry for it before you git through with me."

"I hain't said a word, it's jest a notion she's took, I dun'no why. I hain't said nothin' nor I ain't a goin' to, as long as you behave yourself, Jim Maverick, but the proofs is all ready in case you don't treat me and her jest as you'd orter."

A terrible oath burst from Maverick's lips, but the entrance of the two boys and Minty, prevented any further conversation on this subject; and Lyle, seated in the little porch whither she had retreated from the dining-room, reflected on what she had just heard, its meaning seeming very clear to her in the light of what Miss Gladden had told her the night before.

There were proofs then in existence, probably in that very house, as to her identity. Her friends were correct in their surmises: she had been stolen, and the villain who had committed the deed, even now trembled with apprehension lest his villainy should become known. Those proofs she must have, and it would be worse than useless to demand them of either Maverick or his wife. She must search for them. This she resolved to do, day by day, as opportunity afforded, until there should be no nook or corner which she had not thoroughly explored.

As Lyle recalled all that occurred within the past twenty-four hours, the most eventful period within her recollection thus far, she felt that she had virtually broken with the old life and all its associations, and that she stood upon the threshold of a new life, higher, nobler,—perhaps sweeter,—than any of which she had ever dreamed.

The return of the little company of friends to the house interrupted her thoughts, but not before she had decided fully as to her future course.

After supper, it was decided to spend that first evening on the summit of one of the nearest mountains, to watch

the glories of the sunset, and to give Morton Rutherford a bird's-eye view of the beautiful scenery, before introducing him to its details.

But on the second evening, the entire party set forth for the trip to the cascades, for which Ned was so especially desirous.

Mr. Houston and Miss Gladden led the little procession, Houston carrying her guitar. Ned had constituted himself Lyle's escort by taking the violin, and they came next, while Morton Rutherford and Arthur Van Dorn brought up the rear.

Their two boats were already awaiting them, and Ned, having assisted Lyle to a seat, turned to Van Dorn.

"Mr. Van Dorn," he said in his blandest tones, "may we have the pleasure of your company in our boat?"

As Van Dorn laughingly accepted the invitation, Morton Rutherford turned toward his brother, saying:

"Are you not going to extend an invitation to me, also?"

"Unfortunately," said Ned, with as much dignity as he could assume, "this boat will seat but three people."

"Is that so!" replied his brother, with a curious downward inflection, "unfortunately, then, for Mr. Houston and Miss Gladden, you will have to take the other boat, as I am going in this one myself," and stepping lightly into the boat, he pulled it quickly out into the water, leaving Ned in a state of bewilderment, alone on shore, as Mr. Houston and Miss Gladden were already seated in their boat, and watching this little by-play.

There was a general laugh at Ned's expense, as he clambered into the other boat, exclaiming good-naturedly:

"Well, Mort, that's an awfully shabby trick, but then, it's all I can expect of you, anyhow."

"It's all you deserve, after such attempted selfishness on your part," replied his brother.

They rowed across the lake in the soft light, the glory of the setting sun still reflected from the surrounding peaks, the music of their boat songs accompanied by the dip and plash of the oars.

At last they reached the cascades, and rounding a little



promontory, the glory of that wondrous scene suddenly burst upon them. For a moment Mr. Rutherford sat speechless, and Lyle, facing him, silently enjoyed his surprise and his ecstasy as keenly as he enjoyed the wonderful beauty about him. In his face, she read the same capacity for joy or for suffering which Nature had bestowed upon herself, and when his eyes suddenly met hers again, he saw the tears glistening in their shining depths, and with quick, intuitive sympathy, readily understood the cause.

For a while they rowed back and forth in almost silent admiration; then the boats were brought side by side at the foot of the cascades, and the air resounded with song; sometimes their voices all blending together in exquisite harmony, then in twos and threes, while occasionally, some beautiful old song would be given as a solo.

It had been an evening of rare enjoyment for each one, and they were just about to turn their boats homeward, when Ned Rutherford exclaimed:

"I say, don't let us leave this spot until Miss Maverick sings that song she gave us the first time we came out here, the first we ever heard her sing. I never can forget that song, and it is always associated with this place."

The others joined in the request. Lyle hesitated. Could she trust herself to sing that song to-night? It was easy to sing when love had come to another's heart, but could she sing it now that he had come to her own?

She consented, and the oars rested once more. With her eyes fixed on the distant mountains, Lyle began her song:

"Love is come with a song and a smile."

At the first words, Morton Rutherford started, and as he fixed his eyes on the beautiful singer, her fair form and shining hair outlined against the silvery cascades, it seemed to him the loveliest sight of his whole life.

Her voice, exquisitely sweet as she began, gained in expression and power, until she sang as she had never sung before; and as the last notes died away, Houston, bending his head low, whispered to Miss Gladden:

"Leslie, my dear, do you think now that Lyle's heart

is not susceptible? She never could sing that song in that way if she knew nothing of love."

And Miss Gladden made no reply, for her own heart was too full for words.

The song was ended, and Lyle's eyes suddenly met the dark ones fixed upon her face, and though no words were spoken, she read in their depths that hers was not the only heart to which love had come.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

That night the diminutive lamp that did duty in the room assigned to the two brothers burned till long past the hour of midnight. By its dim light, Ned Rutherford indited a letter to his fiancée, while his brother quietly paced back and forth, the entire length of the small apartment, his hands clasped behind him and his head thrown back,—his usual attitude when in deep thought.

"Getting up another article on the application of electric force?" inquired Ned, as he paused to watch his brother.

"No," was the reply, "I am thinking at present of a force far more subtle and more powerful than that of electricity."

"Why, how's that?" asked Ned in surprise, "I thought electricity was one of your pet hobbies."

"Never mind about my pet hobbies," said his brother, with a smile, "just continue your writing for the present."

Half an hour later, as Ned folded and sealed the voluminous letter, and placed upon it the long, foreign address, his brother, watching him with a curious half smile, said:

"I shall have to give you credit for a great deal of constancy, Ned, more than I really supposed you possessed."

"How's that?" asked Ned, with a slight blush, "to what do you refer?"

"To your fidelity to your affianced," Morton replied, "under the rather adverse circumstances that attend your

suit, and notwithstanding the unusual attractions by which you have been surrounded here."

"Well, as to that," said Ned, slowly, "I don't know as I deserve so very much credit. Houston appropriated Miss Gladden to himself pretty soon after we came here, and besides, she isn't exactly my style, after all; she would suit Houston a great deal better than me."

"Ah," said his brother, quietly, "and what of the younger lady? Perhaps she is not your style, either?"

"Well, no, I should say not," Ned replied, with the least perceptible scorn in his tone, "not but what she is a lovely girl, and I respect her, and feel sorry for her, but I should think one glimpse of her family would decide that question, once for all."

"Ned," said Morton Rutherford, pausing in his walk, directly in front of his brother, "is it possible that you are so blind as not to see that Miss Maverick, as you call her, —I prefer to call her Lyle,—has no connection whatever with the family in which she lives?"

"Do you think so?" Ned inquired, with surprise, "I remember Houston and Miss Gladden expressed the same opinion when I was here before, but I don't think they had any proof that such was the case, and even if it were so, I don't see how it helps the matter much, for nobody knows to what sort of a family she really does belong."

"Ned said his brother, indignantly, "I know nothing of the opinion of Houston or Miss Gladden upon this subject, but where are your own eyes, and where is your reason? If you discovered one of the rarest and most beautiful flowers known to exist in the plant world, in a heap of tailings out here among these mines, would you immediately conclude that, because you had found it there, it must be indigenous to the spot? Look at that girl, and tell me if there is one trace in feature, in form, in manner, or in speech, of plebeian blood, and then will you tell me that she is in any way connected with people such as these? They are not merely plebeian, they are low, debased, criminal. They are criminals of the deepest dye, not only capable of any villainy, but already guilty, and

to such a degree that their guilt has made them shrinking, skulking cowards."

"But, Mort, if you are correct, and I don't say that you are not, how does she come to be in such a place as this, with no memory of anything different?"

"Through the villainy of that man whom you pointed out to me as her father; through his villainy, and in no other way."

"You think she was stolen?"

"I do; I can see in his face that he has committed some terrible crime,—perhaps many of them,—and he is afraid to look a stranger in the eye; and a glance at that beautiful girl is enough to fasten upon him one of his crimes. She is from a family whose blood is as pure from any taint, physical, mental, or moral, as is your own, and unless I am greatly mistaken, she is not wholly unconscious of this herself."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed the younger brother, "I never dreamed of all this! If it is really as you think, I only wish we could find her true home, and have her restored to it, and make that scoundrel suffer for his crime."

"If it is among the possibilities, it shall be done," said Morton Rutherford, quietly, but in a tone which startled Ned with its volume of meaning. The latter looked up in quick surprise, a question on his lips, but he knew his brother's face too well; the question was not asked, and he only said:

"Good for you, Mort, and here's my hand; I'm with you on this, whatever you do."

For the next few days, nothing of any special import occurred at the camp. Houston, soon after the arrival of Morton and Ned Rutherford, had written to his uncle that preparations were now about completed, and everything was so nearly in readiness that he and his party had better come out immediately to one of the western cities, from which they could be summoned by telegraph on short notice. Accordingly, Mr. Cameron had already left New York, and in company with his attorney and the English expert, was now on his way west, Mrs. Cameron also accompanying him as far west as Chicago, where she

was to stop with friends while he went on to the mines, as she had insisted that she would feel much happier to be nearer her husband and Everard, so that she could more easily reach them in the event of any trouble at the mines.

Van Dorn was progressing well with his work, and the machine would soon be ready for its trial test, though he said he would in all probability first have to go to Silver City, in order to have replaced one or two small but important parts which had been broken in the long, westward journey.

Lyle, in the midst of the strange happiness which had lately come to her heart, had not forgotten her resolve to search for the proofs, of such importance to her. On the contrary, she had now a new and powerful incentive which gave additional zest to her efforts, although, thus far, they had proved unsuccessful.

One afternoon, after having made a particularly thorough but fruitless search, she stole quietly out of the house, and following the little path along the shore of the lake, soon found herself in her favorite retreat among the rocks, a secluded place from which there was no sign of human habitation; only the mountains in their vast solitudes were visible, their silent grandeur more eloquent than words. It was a spot that she had loved even in her childhood, and which had, in later years, been her resort for study and reflection.

In a brief interview with Jack, at the cabin, the previous evening, she had told him of her increasingly distinct recollections of her mother, of the angry words between Maverick and his wife which she had overheard, and of her search which she felt would yet result in her obtaining possession of the necessary proofs of her identity.

To her surprise, Jack, while commending the course which she was taking, yet seemed strangely averse to talking much with her upon the subject. At last, as she was leaving the cabin, he had taken her hands in his, saying, in a strangely tender tone:

"My dear Lyle, because I say little, you must not think I take no interest in this affair which concerns you so closely. I am deeply interested, more deeply than you

will probably ever know, but it is for many reasons a painful subject to me, one full of bitter memories; but I have one favor to ask of you, my dear child, which I know you will grant for the sake of the memory of the happy hours we have spent together,—it is this; that whatever proof you may succeed in finding, you will first bring to me.”

“Certainly I will, dear Jack,” Lyle had replied, wondering at his manner, “in whom should I confide if not in you, who have been my first and best friend.”

And he, his dark, piercing eyes looking into the depths of her own, their gaze softened by tender affection, had replied:

“Yes, your friend always, Lyle, remember that; none truer or more devoted to you or your welfare; but before long, my dear, your heart will learn, if it has not learned already, the difference between friendship and love.”

With burning cheeks and tearful eyes Lyle recalled his words, and pondered deeply on the strange bond that seemed, in some way, to exist between his life and hers, but the longer she tried to solve the problem, the deeper and more obscure it seemed.

In the midst of her reflections, she heard a light step upon the rocky footpath, and looking up, saw Morton Rutherford approaching. So absorbed was he in the study of the masses of rock about him, on which had been traced by the finger of the centuries, in wonderful hieroglyphics, the early history of the earth, that for a time he was unconscious of her presence there. When he saw her he raised his hat and came quickly forward.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, in deep, musical tones, “I supposed myself alone with my own thoughts; am I intruding? if so, send me away at once.”

“No, stay, if you please,” said Lyle.

“Thank you,” he answered, seating himself on the rocks at a little distance, “you appeared so lost in thought I feared my coming might annoy you.”

“No,” she replied, “my thoughts were too perplexing, I was growing weary of them.”

Mr. Rutherford glanced at the surrounding mountains;

"Were you, too, trying to fathom the mystery of the eternal hills?" he asked.

"No," was her reply, "I have never attempted anything so far beyond me as that; I have found more mysteries in everyday, human life than I could solve."

Morton Rutheriord was silent for a few moments, then he said in low tones:

"I hope you will pardon me when I say, that to me, your own life here, under the existing circumstances and conditions, is a mystery, one which seems capable of but one solution."

"And what would be your solution?" she asked quickly.

He saw that she understood his meaning, and was watching him intently, eagerly, and he said:

"Permit me to reply to your question by asking one in return. Do you not believe that your life had a beginning elsewhere than here, and under far different conditions?"

"It is more than a belief with me, it is a certainty, and yet, strange as it may appear to you, this knowledge has come to me but recently, and even now, I know nothing of what those conditions may have been, except that they were totally unlike these that exist here."

"You interest me very much are you willing to tell me how you arrived at this knowledge of which you speak?"

Very briefly, and without going into details, Lyle, in response to the magnetic sympathy of those dark eyes, gave a vivid outline of her life, and of the vague impressions which of late were becoming distinct recollections, and of her hope of soon finding tangible evidence regarding the life which was daily growing more and more of a reality.

Mr. Rutherford listened with intense interest to the strange story, and when she had finished, he said slowly, as he took a short turn up and down the rocky path:

"Believe me, I have not listened to this through mere, idle curiosity; much as your story has interested me, it has not surprised me, for I read the truth almost from our first meeting."

Lyle gave him a smile of rare sweetness and deep significance; "I am glad to know that," she said simply.

"Why so?" he asked, pausing and seating himself beside her; "Did you think I could fail to recognize the soul that looked out to welcome me when I first came, no matter amid what surroundings I found it?" Then, as she remained silent, he continued, his tones thrilling her heart as no human voice had ever done before:

"Since the hour that I first met you, Lyle, life has changed for me,—I think perhaps it will never be quite the same again for either of us. I know that I love you with a love that, whether reciprocated or not, can never die; that henceforth, you will be,—you must be,—a part of my very life. Let me care for you and help you; let me help you in your search for the home for which you were created, and of which you are worthy; but, Lyle, before you search any farther for that home, will you not consent to become the queen of my home, as you are already the queen of my heart?"

Lyle lifted her head proudly, though the tears glistened on the long, golden lashes; "Do you ask me that, here and now, knowing nothing as yet, of what the future may reveal?"

"I do; I have no fear for the future if I but have your love. Do you think that, perhaps, in the days to come, amid other and different surroundings, you might find some one whose love your heart would choose in preference to mine?"

"Never!" cried Lyle, impulsively, turning with outstretched arms to him, "You are the only one I have ever loved,—the only one I could ever love!"

"Then that is enough for me," he replied, drawing her closely to his breast; "you have come forth from the years of the wretched past, with a soul star-white and shining, and I have no fears for the future."

When the little group of friends assembled that evening, it was not long before some one discovered that a small diamond ring, of exquisite, antique design, which Morton Rutherford had worn, had, in some manner, become transferred to Lyle's hand. "Wear this, for the present," he had said, in taking it from his own hand. "until I can obtain a costlier one for you," but Lyle had insisted that once placed upon her hand, there it must re-



main, as she would prize it far above any other which money could buy; and such had been the final decision.

When this significant fact had been discovered by one of the little company, the intelligence was speedily telegraphed to the rest, and Morton and Lyle soon found themselves the recipients of hearty and affectionate congratulations from the others.

The astonishment depicted on Ned's face, when he comprehended the turn affairs had taken, was beyond description, but in the little excitement which prevailed for a few moments, it passed unnoticed, so that he had sufficiently recovered himself to join very gracefully in the general congratulations when his turn came.

A few hours later, however, as he went out for a stroll with Van Dorn, while his brother and Houston started out in the direction of Jack's cabin, his astonishment found expression.

"Great Scott! but I never was so dumfounded in my life! I tell you what, Van, I believe people lose their wits when they are in love!"

"On whose experience do you base your highly original remark, your brother's or your own?"

"Well, both, and lots of others besides. I never yet saw a person who was in love that didn't act just the reverse of what you would expect, or of what they would under ordinary circumstances. Now, look at us two, for instance. Look at me! Everybody calls me rash and impetuous, and Mort is always lecturing me for it, and it's always my way to rush head-first into anything that comes along, and here I've been making love, in the regular, orthodox fashion, to a girl I've known ever since I wore knickerbockers, and playing propriety and all that to my prospective father-in-law; and now see Mort! the most precise, deliberate fellow you ever saw, never says or does anything that isn't exactly suited to the occasion, you know; and here he goes and tumbles head over heels in love with a pretty girl the first time he sees her, and when he doesn't know a blessed thing about her, and, by George! engages himself to her before he's known her a week! If that isn't a case of clear-gone lunacy, then I never saw one."

Van Dorn laughed; "Well, of the two, I should prefer your brother's form of lunacy to yours; if I ever was to be in love, I should want the misery over as quickly as possible."

As Houston and his friend, having made a brief call at the cabin, rose to take their leave, the former observed Jack watching Rutherford's face with a degree of interest unusual for him to manifest in a stranger.

"I want you and my friend, Rutherford, to know each other the little time he will be here," he said, addressing Jack, "for though I have never known what it was to have a brother in reality, he seems to me to more nearly fill that position than any one I have known, and I have told him of your kindness and assistance, and the strange bond that has seemed to unite us from the first, though we met as strangers, so he naturally wishes to meet you."

There was a peculiar quiver of the lips under the heavy, black beard, as Jack replied, in deep, full tones, "Mr. Rutherford's face carries with it its own recommendation, and the fact that he is as a brother to yourself will insure him a double welcome here as often as he pleases to come during his stay."

Houston passed onward into the outer room, pausing to chat with Mike, while Morton Rutherford lingered, and extending his hand to Jack, said in low tones:

"I have another reason for wishing to meet you. From what Lyle has told me, I know you to have been, until very recently, her only friend, and to you, as to her friend, and perhaps, in one sense, her guardian, I wish to state that I love her, and have been so fortunate as to win her love in return; and that I hope before very long, my home will be hers."

"Yes, I know," Jack responded, briefly.

"What! has she already told you?" Rutherford asked in surprise.

"Only unconsciously; but I read soon after your coming, that her heart was no longer her own."

Then grasping Rutherford's hand warmly, he added, in tones vibrating with some deep emotion.

"You have chosen better than you know. I believe

I can trust her and her happiness in your hands. God bless you both! and may He bless you in proportion to your love and fidelity toward her!"

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

The following day, Mr. Blaisdell suddenly made his appearance at the camp, accompanied by Mr. Rivers and a mining expert who had come out in the interests of a Chicago firm, looking for good paying investments. Houston had received no word of their coming, and the first intimation which he had of their arrival was the sight of the three gentlemen, as he approached the house at dinner time.

"How are you, Houston?" said Mr. Blaisdell, pausing in his walk up and down before the house, and extending his hand, "How's the work progressing?"

"Finely," replied Houston, "the output is steadily increasing, week by week."

"Keeps you pretty busy, I suppose? Well, I hope we can give you a little help before long; we've located Barden at last, and he starts for the west next week. Let me introduce you to Mr. Parsons, a mining expert from Chicago; Mr. Parsons, this is Mr. Houston, our general superintendent."

Houston exchanged greetings with the stranger, and with Mr. Rivers, the latter watching him closely, though saying very little.

Dinner was served as quickly as possible, as Mr. Parsons was limited for time, and was to return to Silver City on the evening train. Most of the conversation at the table was on mines and mining, Mr. Blaisdell trying to impress each one present, Mr. Parsons in particular, with his extensive knowledge, both theoretical and practical, on all that pertained to the subject, as well as with a sense of the immense value of the properties owned by the company.

"Mr. W. E. Cameron, of New York, owns some very valuable mines out here, I understand," said Mr. Parsons

casually, his innocent remark producing rather a startling effect upon the minds of his listeners, though they, one and all, succeeded in preserving a calm exterior.

"He has an interest in some very fine properties," replied Mr. Blaisdell blandly, though with a visible contracting of the muscles about the mouth, "you are acquainted with Mr. Cameron, I presume?"

"Oh, no, on the contrary, I never even met the gentleman, but he is extensively known among the leading business houses of Chicago, and he was pointed out to me, the day I came away, as the owner of some of the finest mines in this locality," Mr. Parsons explained, thereby carrying consternation to the heart of every one present.

"Did I understand you to say that Mr. Cameron was in Chicago?" inquired Mr. Blaisdell, while Mr. Rivers' restless eyes were at once on the alert.

"Certainly, he was there the day I left; at least, a gentleman with whom I happened to be talking about western investments, pointed him out to me, and cited him as the owner of western properties."

"Ah, yes, did you hear anything said as to whether he was coming this way?"

"Nothing, nothing whatever, except what I have stated."

"It's all right," said Mr. Rivers, speaking for the first time, and in his quick, incisive way; he feared Mr. Blaisdell had betrayed his anxiety; "all right, only we would like to know his whereabouts, as it will be necessary to wire him in a day or two, regarding some ore shipments. Can you give us the hotel where he was stopping?"

"I am very sorry that I cannot oblige you, but I have not the least idea where he was located; I simply saw him passing on the street."

"It is of no consequence," replied Mr. Blaisdell, with assumed indifference, "we can of course ascertain his present address from the New York house; it will take a little more time, that is all. We had better proceed to the mines at once, if Mr. Parsons is ready."

When they had left and Haight was on his way to the

mills, the four young men held a few moments' consultation outside the house.

"By Jingol!" exclaimed Ned Rutherford, "it looks as though old Buncombe was going to get on to our surprise party that we're planning for him! What are you fellows going to do about it?"

"Well," said Van Dorn. "I'm not sure whether this is going to interfere with our arrangements or not; what do you think, Everard? will the company 'smell a rat' anywhere?"

"They are evidently alarmed at the possibility of Mr. Cameron's coming out here, but there is nothing yet to arouse their suspicions against us, so I do not think it will interfere materially with our plans at present. They will be able to learn nothing of my uncle's movements from the New York house, as he will have forestalled them there. He had but just reached Chicago when this Parsons left, and as he and Mr. Whitney wished, if possible, to remain there a few days, to consult with a legal firm who are personal friends of theirs, I think it best, in case this company remains quiet, to take no action yet for two or three days; but if the officers of the company begin to appear suspicious, or as if they were trying to cover their tracks, the sooner we telegraph for our party, the better; get them here as quickly as possible."

"Yes, that will be best," said Morton Rutherford, "if their suspicions are aroused, we cannot be too expeditious, for they will be desperate when they find themselves cornered."

"We must hold ourselves in readiness to act promptly," Houston added, "probably within twenty-four hours we will be able to decide which course to pursue."

Houston went to his work determined to keep a close watch on the movements of Blaisdell and Rivers. A couple of hours later, however, the three men entered the mill where he was engaged superintending the weighing of some ore; Mr. Rivers went at once to Haight's little private office, while Blaisdell approached him with the expert.

"Mr. Houston," he said, "just take Mr. Parsons through the mills and entertain him for the next half

hour. Mr. Rivers and myself will be engaged about that length of time."

Houston complied with the request, and in a very short time discovered that Mr. Parsons' knowledge of metallurgy and mineralogy was exceedingly limited, but that in exact proportion to his own ignorance, he had been profoundly impressed by the knowledge which Mr. Blaisdell had aired for his especial benefit, and the parrot-like way in which he repeated some of the expressions which Mr. Blaisdell kept as his "stock in trade," was very amusing.

Meanwhile Houston was deeply interested in the private meeting held in Haight's little dingy room, as he felt certain that some issues were being discussed and decisions reached that would, in their results, be of the greatest importance to him, and he awaited the reappearance of the general manager and secretary with considerable expectancy.

He was not disappointed; a glance at their faces revealed that the subjects under discussion had not been pleasant. Mr. Blaisdell's face was white, and set in hard, determined lines, while that of his companion was flushed with anger, and his cunning, crafty eyes were full of suspicion, as they glanced repeatedly in Houston's direction.

"Mr. Parsons," said Mr. Blaisdell, "we will have to ask you to excuse Mr. Houston, as we have a little business with him, and if you will step over there in the office and sit down, we will have completed our business in half or three-quarters of an hour; by that time the team will be here, in readiness to take us to the train."

After a few moments of desultory conversation about the work which Houston knew to be only preliminary, during which Mr. Rivers moved about in a nervous, restless manner, Mr. Blaisdell said:

"Mr. Houston, we hear some rather strange reports concerning your conduct lately; your actions have certainly been highly censurable, and the least that can be said is that you have exceeded your authority here in a very marked degree."

"In what respect have I exceeded my authority?" demanded Houston, folding his arms, with an expression

on his face that made the general manager regret that he had begun the encounter; but it was too late to retreat, besides, Rivers was watching him!

"In your manner of discharging the duties assigned to you; you have taken advantage of your position in the most reprehensible and unworthy way, and have overstepped the bounds when you had no right whatever to do so."

"I shall have to ask you to be a little more explicit, Mr. Blaisdell," Houston replied.

"Why don't you come to the point, Blaisdell?" said Rivers impatiently. "What's the use of beating about the bush? The long and the short of it is just this," he added, turning to Houston, "you have been taking upon yourself what did not concern you, prying around, late at night, in mines with which you had nothing whatever to do, in company with miners who had no more business there than you had."

"To what mine do you refer?" asked Houston, with exasperating persistency.

"I mean the Lucky Chance, and you know it," retorted Rivers angrily.

"Mr. Rivers," said Houston, in a tone that Blaisdell had heard on a former occasion, and with a steel-like glitter in his eyes that was anything but attractive to either of the gentlemen present; "Mr. Blaisdell knows, if you do not, that since my first coming here, whatever kind of work has been assigned to me, I have thoroughly familiarized myself with it. When I was given charge of these mines I had reason to suppose that each and every mine owned by the company was included under my supervision, and if there were any which the officers of the company, for reasons of their own, wished excluded from such supervision, it was their business so to inform me. I have not been so informed. Mr. Blaisdell himself took me into that mine, and nothing was said to lead me to suppose that that mine was any exception to those placed in my charge, and your informant, if he chose so to do, could tell you that I have inspected in like manner each and every mine under my supervision, taking with me

one or both of the same men, when the mine happened to be one with which I was not familiar."

"His intentions were all right," interposed Mr. Blaisdell, "he was over-zealous, that was all."

"Intentions be damned!" said Mr. Rivers, angrily, "he was altogether too officious, and I won't have it; people in my employ have to know their place and keep it."

"That is all very well," said Houston, in cutting tones, "but I will not ask you, Mr. Rivers, or any one connected with this company, to tell me my place."

"What!" exclaimed Rivers in a rage, "let me tell you, young man, it is to your interest to be a little careful."

"Is it?" answered Houston scornfully; "Mr. Rivers," he added, advancing toward that gentleman, "why don't you discharge me? Wouldn't that be to your interest?"

Mr. Rivers saw he had gone too far; "No," he answered quickly, though sullenly, "we have said nothing about discharging you; you are too efficient a man for us to lose."

"No, Houston," added Mr. Blaisdell, "we wouldn't think of discharging you, you're too good a man."

"No, I'm not too good a man," replied Houston, facing them both with a look which they understood; "you don't discharge me simply because,—you don't dare to!" and he emphasized the last words with a heavy blow upon a rude desk standing near.

Blaisdell and Rivers exchanged glances, and for a moment were speechless. The former was the first to recover himself.

"Come, Houston," he said, in a conciliatory tone, "we won't have any more words; we all understand one another pretty well, and there'll be no more complaints or trouble. You go on pretty much as you have done, and it will be all right. It's time we were getting back now, but I'll be out here next week with Barden, and we'll fix things up satisfactory all 'round."

"When will he get here?" asked Houston.

"The latter part of next week."

Houston thought an instant, his party would be there the first or middle of the week.



"Very well," he replied, "I tender my resignation now, to take effect when he comes."

"Oh, no, Houston, no indeed, why, we couldn't think of such a thing," said Blaisdell, really alarmed, while Rivers maintained a sullen silence.

"I am not particularly anxious to hold this position, I can assure you; there is very little in it but hard work."

"Oh, well, well, you stay by us a while longer, and we'll take you into the company yet."

"No," said Houston, "it would be no use taking me into the company, I wouldn't know my place, or keep it," and with that parting shot, he turned and left them.

"Blaisdell," said Rivers, his face relaxing for a moment into a grim smile, "it's just as I told you, your smart young man is too smart for you. It's my opinion we've caught a tartar;—we're afraid to keep him, and we don't dare let him go."

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## CHAPTER XL.

As Houston, on the following morning, in the execution of his daily round of duties, happened to be passing the Yankee Boy mine, his attention was arrested by a quantity of powder deposited near the mouth of the shaft, which the workmen were preparing to take below.

"What is the meaning of this?" he inquired sternly. "Who has given any orders for this powder to be brought here?"

"Them was the boss's orders, sir," replied one of the men, respectfully.

"The boss? whom do you mean?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, I meant the boss as was up here yisterday; Mr. Haight, he told me this morning as these was the orders he give him."

"Haight," said Houston, as, a few moments later, he entered the office of that individual, "did Mr. Blaisdell leave orders yesterday for powder to be taken over to the Yankee Boy mines?"

"Yes," replied Haight, with his usual smile, "and I in-

tended to have spoken to you about it this morning, but I forgot it."

"What is his object? any blasting to be done?"

"Yes, we had quite a long consultation together yesterday, he and Rivers and I, and we decided that it would pay to do some extensive drifting in those mines, and a good deal of that rock will have to be blasted."

"How soon is this blasting to begin?"

"Well, I can't say exactly, just how soon, probably within the next seven or eight days."

"In what direction is the drifting to extend?"

Haight looked slightly surprised but replied: "We're a little undecided about that, just what course to take; Rivers was for one thing, and Blaisdell and I for another. After they have blasted a ways, we can tell something from the character of the rock in what direction it will be best to run the drift."

After a few more questions, some of which Haight did not answer so readily as might have been expected, Houston left him. He did not proceed at once to the building where Van Dorn was at work, but first returned to the mines, where he discovered that the powder was not only being stored in the Yankee Boy group, but also in the Lucky Chance, and one or two others of the surrounding mines. A little later he made an errand to that part of the mills where Van Dorn was to be found, and quietly calling him to one side, related to him what he had discovered, and his talk with Haight.

Van Dorn was more familiar with mines, their methods of operation, and the rules governing their underground workings, than Houston, and he immediately exclaimed:

"By George! that fellow is a fool, Everard, or else he was simply 'stuffing' you; to drift in the direction he mentioned would be a useless expenditure of time and money, there would be nothing in it, it is utterly absurd!"

"I mistrusted as much," said Houston, "and I have my own opinion as to the meaning of all this, but I wished to get your idea of the matter. What do you think of it?"

"It looks to me," said Van Dorn slowly, "as though

they were making preparations to blow up these mines, at a moment's warning."

"That," said Houston, "was just the conviction that forced itself upon my mind when I saw that powder, though I will admit I had never once thought of their resorting to such measures as that."

"It's about the only thing left for them to do, by George! after the shape in which they have got things; their idea probably would be, in the event of Mr. Cameron's coming, to destroy in this way all the evidence, as they think, existing against them. It shows pretty conclusively that they have no suspicions of us, for if they knew the evidence in our possession they would blow us up rather than the mines. You will telegraph at once for Mr. Cameron, will you not?"

"At once; we must get him here as quickly and as quietly as we can; before they put their plans into action, if possible."

"That is the thing to do; they probably will take no action unless they hear of his coming. We ought to get a dispatch off before night."

"We will," Houston replied, with quiet decision.

"How will you manage it? It will look rather suspicious for you or me to leave our work and go down to the Y with a message."

"Give Morton our dispatch and cipher book, and he will attend to it better than you or I, for he is an expert operator."

"By George! that's so, I had forgotten it; he learned telegraphy there at college just to amuse himself, and had a battery in his room; well, that's fortunate, he will be just the one for us."

"It is nearly noon," said Houston, consulting his watch, "we will see Morton at the house, and arrange the message between us, and he will send it immediately."

After dinner, there was a brief consultation in Houston's room with the result that the following dispatch was formulated, written in cipher, and addressed to Mr. Whitney, at Chicago, the attorney from New York, accompanying Mr. Cameron:

"Come at once, no delay; go to Arlington Hotel, Silver City; keep dark, do not register. Van Dorn will meet you at hotel."

Houston realized that they were now rapidly approaching the final denouement,—the closing act of the drama which might yet prove a tragedy,—and as he placed the folded slip of paper in Morton Rutherford's hand, he said with a sigh:

"This is the beginning of the end."

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## CHAPTER XLI.

As Morton Rutherford's fingers touched the key of the little instrument that was to send forth that fateful message, it was the unconscious touching of a secret spring which was to set in motion a succession of events of which he little dreamed.

He remained at the station until the answer came back over the wires:

"Leave Chicago to-night; will follow instructions to the letter."

This was on Saturday. On Tuesday the expected party would reach Silver City, where they were to be met by Van Dorn, who would furnish them all details and accompany them on the evening train to the Y, from which point Houston and Morton Rutherford would convey them by team to the mining camp.

From Saturday until Tuesday only! but those intervening days were full of a strange excitement for the little group of friends who were in the secret, and there was that constant sense of expectancy, combined with an alert watchfulness, which kept the nerves tense and rigid, and rendered the mind unusually clear and active.

On Monday, Van Dorn left for Silver City, his errand ostensibly being to replace the broken portions of the machinery, now nearly finished, which were necessary for its completion.

All felt that the climax to which they had looked forward was now very near, and Lyle, who perhaps realized the situation the most keenly of any, was restless and excited, something very unusual for her.

Her search, thus far unsuccessful, had not been abandoned, and as she sat in the little porch on that particular afternoon, idle because she could not fix her attention upon book or work, it seemed as if the years of her early life among the mountains stood out with more than usual distinctness. Among other trifling objects, there was suddenly recalled to her memory a box which used always to stand in Mrs. Maverick's little bed-room, and which had looked wonderfully attractive to her childish eyes on account of a flowered red and green paper with which it was covered. Once, overcome with infantile curiosity, she had tried to open it, and had received a severe whipping therefor. She could remember it very distinctly now, a box about eighteen inches square, with no fastening, but always securely tied with a stout cord. Late years it had been removed to the little attic and she had forgotten it. Where was it now? She had not seen it for months, or was it years? What could it have contained?

Miss Gladden was occupied with a new magazine. Morton and Ned Rutherford had gone out for a stroll among the rocks. Quietly Lyle slipped up-stairs, and going to the dark, dusty attic, began searching for the object so suddenly recalled to mind.

She could find no trace of it, however, and had about concluded that it must have been destroyed, when her attention was arrested by a pile of old clothing and rubbish on the floor in a particularly dark corner, behind some large boxes. A slight examination revealed that there was some solid substance underneath. Hastily overturning the rubbish, her eyes descried in the dim light the identical red and green papered box familiar to her childhood.

With an exclamation of joy she dragged it forth from its hiding place, and going over to the one tiny window, covered with dust and cobwebs, she sat down with the newly found treasure, first arranging a pile of old bedding

as a screen between herself and the door, to preclude all possibility of her whereabouts being discovered.

With fingers trembling with excitement, she undid the fastenings of the heavy cord and slowly lifted the cover, not knowing exactly what she expected or hoped to find, but certain that the key for which she had searched was close at hand.

Within the box lay a large parcel wrapped in a newspaper, worn and yellow with age, and pinned to the parcel was a letter, addressed in a cramped, almost illegible hand:

"To Lyle,  
to be read after my death."

Lyle recognized the writing,—it was Mrs. Maverick's, whose educational advantages, though exceedingly limited, were yet superior to those of her husband, in that she could read and write, though she had little idea of the rules of grammar or orthography.

Lyle unpinned the letter and turned it over curiously in her hands for a moment; then she laid it aside, saying to herself:

"I will first see what this package contains, and will probably open that later."

She lifted the parcel and began removing the paper wrappings, which burst like tissue and dropped in pieces, leaving a mass of fine cambric and dainty laces and embroideries, from which was exhaled a perfume, faint and subtle, and yet which recalled to Lyle so vividly the memories of that long-ago forgotten time, that she seemed like one awakening from a long oblivion to the scenes of a once familiar life. For a moment, she grew faint and dizzy, and, closing her eyes, leaned against the wall for support, while she tried to grasp the vision that seemed just ready to open up before her. But it passed, and with a sigh she opened her eyes, her gaze falling on the contents of the package which had fallen open.

She saw the dress of a little child,—apparently about two years of age,—a marvelous creation of the finest of white linen and the daintiest of embroideries; lying within it was a broad sash of blue silk, neatly folded together,

a pair of tiny, blue silk stockings, and little kid shoes of the same delicate shade; but the shoes and sash, as well as the dress, were soiled and blackened as if they had come in contact with charred wood.

The dress and the little undergarments each and all bore the initials "M. L. W.," and Lyle pondered over them with wondering eyes, while handling with reverent touch these relics of her childhood,—a childhood which she could not recall.

As she unrolled the blue sash, there dropped from within its folds a small, pasteboard box, which she hastily opened, exposing to view a tiny gold locket and chain of rare workmanship and exquisite design. Upon touching a little spring, it opened, and Lyle gave a low cry of delight, for there was revealed the same beautiful face which she had seen in Jack's cabin,—the face of her mother. For some time she gazed at it through fast-gathering tears, then happening to note the engraving on the inside of the case, opposite to the picture, she held it closer to the light, to discern the delicate characters of the inscription, and read:

"To Marjorie Lyle Washburn,  
Upon her second birthday."

Lyle Maverick no longer, but Marjorie Lyle Washburn! She repeated the name over and over to herself,—the magic talisman by which she was to find the home and friends she sought!

Kissing the locket reverently, she replaced it in the box, and folding together the little garments, she again took up the letter. She studied it for a moment, then resolutely breaking the seal, began to read its contents. It was slow work, for the writing in many places was so poor as to be nearly illegible, but, with burning cheeks and eyes flashing with indignation at what it revealed, she read it to the end.

In uncouth phrases and illiterate language, and yet with a certain pathos, Mrs. Maverick told the story of the death, years before, while their home was east, in Ohio, of her own little girl between two and three years

of age, and her inconsolable sorrow. A few months afterward, Jim had suddenly returned from a neighboring town where he was working, bringing with him a beautiful little girl of the same age as her own, but unusually advanced for her years, whose father and mother he claimed had been killed in a railroad accident, and of whose friends nothing could be learned. His wife had accepted his story in good faith, and welcomed the motherless little one to her own lonely heart. Unknown to Jim, who had charged her to burn them, she had also preserved the garments worn by the little stranger on that day.

But the little one did not take kindly to her new surroundings but cried piteously for her mother, night and day, even refusing food of all kinds, until she was suddenly taken with a strange illness which lasted for many weeks. When she finally recovered, all memory of her former life seemed to have been completely blotted out of her mind, and she no longer called for her mother, except occasionally in her sleep. Very soon after they had come out to the mines, and nothing of any importance occurred until Lyle was about seven years old.

At that time, Jim had suddenly made his appearance at the house one day, appearing both angry and frightened, and had ordered his wife to keep Lyle locked up, on pretext of punishing her, until he gave permission for her release. He would give no explanation, and by his curses and threats compelled her to obey.

That day, a fine-looking, elderly gentleman, who had just arrived from the east to purchase some mining property, came to the house for dinner, and took his meals there for the two days following, during which time, Lyle was not allowed her liberty. Not until nearly a year later did Mrs. Maverick learn that the eastern stranger, whose coming had so terrified Maverick, was Lyle's grandfather. Jim then confessed that he had taken the child from the wreck where its mother had lost her life, and brought her west with him, knowing whose child she was, and keeping her out of revenge for some wrong which he claimed this man had done him years before.

In vain his wife urged to have the child returned to her



rightful home; he threatened her life if she ever breathed the secret to any living soul. A sense of guilt made her unhappy for a time, but as years passed she grew more indifferent to it, and as she saw, more and more, how utterly unlike any of her own family Lyle was growing, she no longer cared for her as she had done, though she tried to treat her kindly. Jim's hatred of Lyle seemed to increase with every year, until his wife sometimes feared that he would resort to personal violence.

As she found her own health and strength failing she began to reflect upon the terrible position in which Lyle would find herself in case of her own death, left alone with Maverick and his two sons, and to save her from such a fate, she had resolved to write this letter, acquainting Lyle with her own history so far as she was able to give it.

At the close she begged Lyle not to think too harshly of her or consider that she was altogether to blame in this matter, and expressed the wish that she might some day find her own friends from whom she had been taken.

It would be impossible to describe Lyle's emotions as she finished the perusal of this strange letter; joy that she had finally found the evidence she sought, and an intense longing to see those from whom she had been so cruelly separated all these years, mingled with a fearful apprehension lest this knowledge might have come too late, when those whose affection she would claim, might have already passed beyond the limits of finite, human love, into the love infinite and eternal. And deep in her heart burned indignation, fierce and strong, against the one who had wrought all this wretchedness,—carrying additional sorrow to a home already bereaved, robbing her of the love that was rightfully hers and of the dower of a happy childhood which could never be restored,—all to gratify his cowardly revenge!

In the midst of these reflections, Lyle suddenly recalled the promise she had given Jack that he should be the first to learn of her success. It was now time for him to be at the cabin and she would have an opportunity to see him before the return of the others to the house. Accordingly, she restored the empty box to its hiding place, and having concealed the most of its contents in

her own room, started forth on her joyful errand, taking with her the tiny locket and the letter.

As she approached the cabin she saw Jack sitting with Rex in the door-way and knew that he was alone. Jack, to whom her face was an open book, read the tidings which she had brought before they had exchanged a word. He rose to meet her, and looking into her radiant face, he said in gentle tones and with a grave smile:

"You have good news! Have you found what you hoped to find?"

"I have," she replied, "and you who have shared all my troubles must be the first sharer of my joy."

Together they entered the cabin, and seated in the little, familiar room, Lyle told the story of her discovery, and opening the locket, placed it in Jack's hands.

For a moment he gazed silently at the little trinket, then he said in low tones, as if half to himself, "It is she, and you are her child, as I have always believed," then added, "I rejoice with you, Lyle, I am glad for your sake."

But even as he spoke, Lyle, notwithstanding the exuberance of her own joy, could not fail to observe in his face indications of poignant pain, as he looked at the lovely pictured face, and as she repeated the name inscribed opposite.

"Jack!" she suddenly exclaimed, "have I made you suffer by my thoughtlessness? Forgive me!"

"No, my dear," he answered tenderly, "you have caused me no pain; if I suffer, it is on account of bitter memories of which you as yet know nothing, and I pray you may never know. What letter have you there?"

Lyle read the letter, Jack silently pacing up and down the room, listening, with a look of intense indignation deepening on his face, until she had finished.

"It is as I have suspected all these years," he said, "the dastardly villain! the scoundrel! Thank God, it is not yet too late, there are those who can and will right the wrong, so far as it is possible to right it."

At Lyle's request, they compared the picture with the photograph in Jack's possession; they were one and the

same, except that the latter had been taken a few years earlier.

"Jack," said Lyle earnestly, "can you tell me anything about my relatives? Are my grandparents living? and had my parents brothers or sisters?"

"I have learned quite recently that your grandparents are still living," Jack answered slowly, after a pause, "as to the others I cannot say; even of your own mother I can trust myself to say but very little, it is too painful!"

"What would you advise me to do now?" Lyle asked wistfully, but with slight hesitation. "What would be the best course for me to take?"

With an expression unlike anything she had ever seen on his face, and a depth of pathos in his voice she had never heard, he replied very tenderly:

"I can no longer advise you, my dear Lyle; take these proofs which you have found to Everard Houston; he can advise you now far better than I; show them to him, my dear, and you will have no further need of counsel or help from me, much as I wish it were in my power to give both."

"To Mr. Houston?" Lyle had risen in her surprise, and stood regarding Jack with tearful, perplexed astonishment; there was a hidden significance in his words which as yet she could not fathom. "I do not understand you, Jack; why do you speak as though you could no more be to me the friend and counselor that you have been?"

He smiled one of his rare, sweet smiles. "Do as I have suggested, dear,—then you will understand; and I shall want to see you for a few moments again to-night, after you have seen him."

Somewhat reassured by his smile, and yet perplexed by his manner, Lyle left the cabin and slowly returned to the house, everything about her seeming unreal, as though she were walking in a dream.

Miss Gladden was chatting with Morton and Ned Rutherford, and in reply to Lyle's question whether Mr. Houston had returned, stated that he was in his room, having just come up from the mines.

"Thank you, I will see him just a moment," Lyle responded, passing into the house.

"You have not heard any bad news, have you?" asked Miss Gladden apprehensively, noting the peculiar expression on Lyle's face.

"No," the latter answered with a smile, "it is about nothing regarding himself that I wish to see him, only something concerning myself."

The door stood open into Houston's room, and Lyle could see him standing by the table, arranging some papers which he proceeded to sort and tie up in separate parcels.

In response to her light knock he glanced quickly around, and observing her unusual expression, advanced to meet her, thinking, as did Miss Gladden, that possibly she had heard something appertaining to the present situation of affairs at the camp.

"Good evening, Lyle, come in; you look as though you were the bearer of important news of some kind."

"I have news," she replied, "though of importance only to myself; I need a little counsel, and was told to come to you."

"You know, Lyle, I will only be too glad to give you any advice, or render any assistance within my power."

"Thank you," she answered, at the same time producing the little box and the letter. "Leslie has probably told you of the manner in which I learned that the proofs as to my true parentage and my own identity existed within this house, and of my search for them since that time."

Houston bowed in assent.

"To-day," she continued, "my search proved successful, in so far as that I have discovered my own name, and also the proofs that I was stolen by that villain, Maverick, in a spirit of retaliation and revenge; but I have as yet no knowledge as to who or where my friends may be. Naturally, I took these proofs to Jack, and asked his advice as to the best course to pursue, and he has sent me to you."

"I am more than glad to hear this, my dear Lyle," responded Houston cordially; "I have always felt a great

interest in you, and it will give me much pleasure if I can assist you in finding your friends, and I shall appreciate it highly if Jack has intrusted me with this responsibility."

Taking the locket from the box, Lyle handed it, unopen, to Houston, saying as she did so, "This is the only clue I have by which to find my friends; it contains my mother's picture, and my own name,—Marjorie Lyle Washburn."

"Washburn!" exclaimed Houston in surprise, pausing as he was about to open the locket. "Washburn! Marjorie Washburn! That sounds familiar, both those names occur in my uncle's family, his wife and his daughter,—ah, I recall it now, that was the name of my cousin's little daughter. Strange!—what! what is this?" He had opened the locket and was gazing in astonishment at the beautiful face. "This,—this is her picture, the picture of my cousin, Edna Cameron Washburn! What is the meaning of this?" And, unable to say anything further, he looked to Lyle for an explanation.

She, too, was nearly speechless with astonishment. "What did you say was her name?" she stammered.

Houston repeated the name, while a strange light began to dawn in his face.

"She was my mother," Lyle said simply. She could say nothing more, the walls of the little room seemed to be whirling rapidly about her, and she could see nothing distinctly.

Faintly, as though sounding far in the distance, she heard Houston's voice as he exclaimed:

"Can it be possible? and yet, you resemble her! Why have I never thought of it before? She had a little daughter Marjorie, whom we always supposed was killed in the wreck in which her own life was lost."

"And this," said Lyle, holding out the letter, but speaking with great effort, for the room was growing very dark, and a strange numbness seemed stealing over heart and brain, "this tells that I was stolen from the side of my dead mother who was killed in a wreck—" She could get no farther, and she knew nothing of his reply. A thick darkness seemed to envelop her, fast shut-

ting out all sense even of life itself. There was a sound for an instant like the deafening roar of waters surging about her, and then she seemed sinking down, down into infinite depths, until she lost all consciousness. For the first time in her life she had fainted.

Houston caught her as she was falling, and a moment later the little group outside were startled by his sudden appearance.

"Leslie," he said, in quick, low tones, "you and Morton come to my room. Lyle has fainted."

"What is the trouble, Everard?" asked Ned, springing to his feet. "Anything serious?"

"I think not," was Houston's reply. "Her fainting was the result of over-excitement. Come into my room, Ned, when she has revived, I think I have made a discovery in which we will all be interested."

When he returned Lyle was beginning to revive, though unable to speak, and leaving her in the care of Leslie and Morton for a few moments, Houston hastily scanned the letter which Lyle had given him, soon reading enough of its contents here and there to get a correct idea of the whole.

Both Miss Gladden and Morton Rutherford realized that something had transpired out of the usual order of events. Each believed it connected with some discovery relating to Lyle's early history, but of what nature the discovery might be they had no clue.

As soon as she was able to speak Houston was at her side, and she read in his face the confirmation of the truth which had dawned upon her mind as he had repeated her mother's name, but which had seemed to her past belief.

"It is really true, and I have not been dreaming?" she asked.

"It is most certainly true, my dear Lyle," Houston replied, and I am very glad to find that you, who have seemed to me like a sister from our first acquaintance, will soon be my sister in reality."

Stooping, he kissed her on the forehead, and then in reply to the glances of astonishment on the part of the others, he said:

"Leslie, I will have to prepare you for a double surprise, and since we four are now members of one family, I can speak here without reserve. When I first won your love, my dear, it was as the salaried clerk of a disreputable mining company. I was old-fashioned enough to wish to win your love with love, to feel assured that you cared for me for my own sake. Lately, you have known that I was the representative of Mr. Cameron, of New York, but you did not know that I was Mr. Cameron's nephew and adopted son,—his son in all respects, excepting that I have not taken his name." He paused a moment, and laid his hand affectionately on Lyle's shoulder. "I now have a pleasant surprise for you both. I wish to introduce you to Marjorie Lyle Washburn, my cousin and my adopted sister."

With a burst of tears, Miss Gladden knelt beside Lyle, throwing her arms about her neck, while Lyle whispered:

"Dear Leslie, you have been like a sister to me in my poverty and loneliness. I am glad we will not be separated in the life of love and happiness that awaits me. We will be sisters still, more closely united than ever."

Turning to Morton Rutherford, whose emotion seemed nearly as deep as Miss Gladden's, Houston said:

"Morton, you remember hearing of my beautiful cousin Edna, and of the sad death of herself and her little daughter, as we always supposed. This is her daughter, and I know that when my uncle and aunt meet her, they will adopt her as their own daughter in her mother's place."

It would be impossible to depict the scene that followed, the surprise and delight of Miss Gladden, or the deep joy of Morton Rutherford, but by and by, when they had become more calm, a knock was heard. Houston opened the door, and Ned Rutherford, looking in, was entirely unable to comprehend the scene. Houston held in his hand a small gold locket and a photograph which he seemed to be comparing with each other. Lyle looked very pale, but radiantly happy. Morton was

standing near, while Miss Gladden still knelt at her side, her eyes overflowing with tears of joy.

"Come in, Ned," said Houston cordially. "We want you here to complete the family group."

Ned looked rather bewildered, as he replied: "I just wanted to inquire for Miss Maverick, to know if she was better."

"She is much better," said Houston with a smile, but before he could say anything further, Morton turned toward his brother, saying in gentle, quiet tones, but with a look in his eye which spoke volumes to Ned's inner consciousness:

"Ned, this is Miss Maverick no longer, but Miss Washburn, the grand-daughter of the Mr. Cameron whom we expect here to-morrow."

Poor Ned Rutherford! If he had ever laid any claim to dignity and self-possession, they both deserted him now. Utterly bereft of speech, he stood for a moment as if petrified. Then approaching Lyle, he stammered:

"I beg your pardon, Miss,—Miss Washburn, but that is always Mort's way, to spring anything on me in such a fashion as to knock me out completely. I beg your pardon for appearing so stupid, and I congratulate you on the good news, and extend you my best wishes, Miss —"

"Oh, call me Lyle," she interrupted, with a rippling laugh. "I have a right to that name yet."

"Is that so?" said Ned, with the air of a drowning man clutching at a straw. "Thank you; I'm glad that's left for a sort of land mark, you know. I'll call you 'Lyle' then, 'till I can get accustomed to the new name," and he sank in a heap in the nearest chair.

The letter was read, and bitter were the denunciations against Maverick.

"The scoundrel! He ought to be lynched this very night," said Ned. "That's the way they do those things out here."

"Not late years, Ned," corrected his brother, "and even if they did, that would not be best."

"It is a question with me," said Houston, "situated just as we are at present, and with Mr. Cameron expect-



ed in a few hours, whether it would be wise to do anything about this until after his arrival."

"I think not," said Morton, "under the circumstances, you do not want to arouse the antipathy of any of the miners before Mr. Cameron's coming, and as Maverick knows nothing of this discovery, he will of course remain here, and Mr. Cameron can advise in this matter as he thinks best."

And this was the final decision.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

A few hours later Lyle stood in the gloaming, taking leave of Jack, in the quaint, cozy room in the cabin, little dreaming that they stood there together for the last time.

They had talked long and earnestly of the new life opening up before her, and her tears flowed fast as she recalled the happy hours they had spent together, or as she anticipated the days to come. Her tears were not the only ones, but the friendly twilight, rapidly deepening, concealed the others.

"And to think that you have known so much of this all the time, and did not tell me!" she exclaimed.

"It was best, my little one, best for each of us. I was constantly planning how I might bring this about when the right time came. That time has come, and as my little girl, whom I have loved as deeply as any one in the future can ever love her, and whom I have cherished and helped to the extent of my limited power, goes forth into this new life, I can and will rejoice in the joy, the love and the happiness that will be hers. And I know that amid new scenes, new friends and new loves, she will never quite forget the old friend and the old love."

"Never, Jack; I could never forget you, and Everard and Morton will never forget you. They are coming to see you to-night. Dear Jack, why could you not give up this lonely life, and go with us to the east? We

would all love you and make you one of us, and our home would be yours."

"My dear child," he replied with a slight shudder, "you know not what you ask. I know the love that prompted it, but never ask it again."

"Very well," said Lyle, with a sorrowful submission, "but I know what I can do." And she put her arms about his neck. "I will come out to the mountains and visit you here."

Then, as he remained silent, she queried:

"You would be here, wouldn't you, Jack, where I could find you?"

Oh, the agony which his strong, loving heart endured! How could he tell her that even then he never expected to look upon her face again! He could not. He only said:

"I cannot tell, dear, my life is an erratic and wandering one. No one, not even I, can say where I may be."

"But you have not lived a wandering life lately; you have lived here for many years."

"Because the lodestone, the magnet of my heart was here," he answered half-playfully, half-tenderly. "When that is gone, I shall be likely to fly off in a tangent again."

"Oh, Jack, you must not talk so. I want to see you in the years to come. I must and I will. I feel it," she added brightly.

For answer, Jack, for the first time, placed his arms about her, and for a moment folded her closely to his breast. Then, bending his head, he kissed her reverently, first on the forehead, then on the lips, saying, "God bless you always, my dear child!"

She returned the kiss, and as he released her, she whispered:

"Good-night, dear Jack!"

"Good-night, my dear," he answered, adding under his breath, "and good-bye!"

After she had gone, he sat in the gathering darkness alone, lost in thought. The collie, returning from attending Lyle on her homeward walk, divined, with keen, unerring instinct, the sorrow in his master's heart, and

coming close, laid his head upon his knee, in mute sympathy and affection. His master stroked the noble head, but his thoughts were far away, and he was only aroused at length by the sound of voices, as Everard Houston and Morton Rutherford entered the cabin. The moon had now risen, and the little room in which he sat was filled with a soft, silver radiance.

Jack rose to meet his guests, and his quick ear detected the vibration of a new emotion in Houston's voice, and as they exchanged greetings, there was something in the clasp of their hands that night that thrilled the heart of each one as never before.

At heart, Jack was glad of the presence of Morton Rutherford. He feared that alone with Houston, after the events of that day, and in the light of the anticipated events of the morrow, his own emotions might prove too strong, weakening the perfect self-control which he felt he must now exercise. The presence of Rutherford acted as a tonic, and restored the desired equilibrium.

"Mr. Houston already knows my aversion to a lamp, and if you do not object, Mr. Rutherford, we will sit for a while in the moonlight."

"By all means," said Rutherford. "I myself dislike the glare of a bright light for genuine, friendly intercourse. A soft, subdued light is much more conducive to mutual confidence and interchange of thought and feeling."

"Jack, my dear friend," said Houston, after a few moments of general conversation upon indifferent subjects, an effort on Jack's part to ward off the inevitable which he felt was surely coming, "You have added very materially to our happiness to-day, in that you have helped us to a happy solution of some of the mysteries that have perplexed us, and in doing this, have brought us all into much closer relations with one another."

"You refer, of course, to Lyle," Jack replied, "but while I am very glad to have contributed to your happiness, I really deserve no credit therefor. I have suspected the relationship for some time, and was only waiting for the necessary proofs, which I felt would be found in good time."

"But that is not the only mystery you have solved for us, or for me," said Houston. "I think we now have a reason for the interest you have manifested in Lyle, and the kindness you have shown her; and, speaking for myself, I believe I have found a clue to the strange bond of mutual sympathy which has united us almost from our first meeting, even before we had exchanged one word; notwithstanding the coldness and reserve of your manner, I felt that back of it all you were my friend, and so it has proved. There has sprung up between us an affection which I believe to be mutual, and of a depth and power remarkable for such a brief acquaintance. But to-night there seems, to my mind, to be a reason for this, which I have been so blind as never to suspect."

"And what may that reason be?" inquired Jack, calmly.

"You will understand of course, my dear friend, as I have often said to you, I have no wish to question you regarding your life in the past, or to lead you to make any statements regarding yourself which you would not make freely and voluntarily; but to me it is evident that, although we met as strangers, you must sometime have been at least a trusted friend of the members of my uncle's family, if not more intimately connected with them."

After a pause Jack replied, slowly:

"As you are aware, I once knew Lyle's mother, and her memory is still unspeakably dear to me. I also knew the other members of Mr. Cameron's family, but that was all long ago in that past which is gone beyond recall, and to which any reference only brings the most bitter pain. When I learned your name and your true business here, I knew, of course, to what family you belonged, and I may have felt some degree of interest in you on that account, but the deep affection between us, which is, as you say, mutual, is, on my part, wholly for your own sake, because I knew you worthy of it. Regarding Lyle, I observed the wonderful resemblance between her and her mother, and it has been to me a source both of joy and of pain, especially of late, since it has

grown so marked, and I have sometimes wondered that you did not observe it for yourself."

"Now that I can see the resemblance so plainly, it seems strange that I did not think of it before," Houston replied. "She has always reminded me vaguely of some one, I could not recall whom. I can only account for it from the fact that I really saw my cousin Edna but seldom after I went to my uncle's home, as she was married very soon, and then we saw her only occasionally until her death, which occurred when I was only about twelve years of age. Consequently, my recollection of her was not particularly distinct. I am anticipating the meeting between her and my uncle and aunt,—they will recognize her immediately, and I am confident they will adopt her as their own daughter, in her mother's place."

Jack started almost imperceptibly. "You do not expect Mrs. Cameron here with her husband?"

"She will not come out with him, but she insisted on coming as far as Chicago, so that she would be able to reach us more readily in case of trouble, and I have thought to-day, since this recent discovery, that if the case against the company seems likely to take some time, I might go on to Chicago and bring her out to meet Lyle, and I would, of course, like her to meet Leslie, also."

Jack remained silent, and withdrew a little farther into the shadow. It was Morton Rutherford who spoke now.

"Did you not once tell me, Everard, in the old college days, that Mr. Cameron had lost a son also?"

"Yes," said Houston, with a sigh. "That was a far heavier blow for them than the death of their daughter. He was their joy and pride, their hearts were bound up in him."

"Ah," said Jack, in a voice almost cold in its even calmness. "I remember that Miss Cameron,—as I knew her,—had a brother. Is he also dead?"

"We are compelled to believe that he must be dead," Houston answered, after a pause, in a tone of deep sadness. "He left home soon after his sister's death, and we have never heard from him since, though his parents

searched for him, not in this country alone, but in others as well."

"I beg your pardon for having alluded to it, Everard," said Rutherford, "you never told me the particulars, and I did not realize they were so painful."

"No apologies are necessary among us three friends," Houston replied. "Guy's parents and I are the only living human beings who know, or ever will know, the reason for his leaving as he did. My uncle spent vast sums of money and employed detectives all over the world in his efforts to find him, and to let him know that the old home was open to him, and would always be just what it had been in the past. But it was of no avail, we could not even get any tidings of him, and uncle, long ago, gave him up for dead, though Aunt Marjorie believes that he is still living, and that he will yet return."

"The faith of a good woman is sometimes simply sublime," replied Rutherford, "and a mother's love is something wonderful. To me it seems the nearest divine of anything we meet on earth."

There was no response from the figure sitting motionless in the shadow. At that moment it required all the force of his tremendous will power to stem the current of almost uncontrollable emotion, surging across his soul.

But the moments passed, other topics were introduced and discussed, and Jack joined in the conversation as calmly as the others.

"I suppose," he remarked, as, a little later, he accompanied his guests to the door, "I suppose that before this time to-morrow, Mr. Cameron will have already arrived at the camp?"

"Yes," Houston replied, "we expect him over on the evening train, with Van Dorn."

As Houston and Rutherford took leave of Jack, there was something in his manner, something in the long, lingering hand-clasp which seemed more like a farewell than like a simple good-night, at which they silently wondered.

Could they have looked in upon him an hour later, they would have understood the cause. Silently he moved about the room, gathering together the few little

keepsakes among his possessions which he most prized. These he placed in a small gripsack which he carefully locked, saying to himself, as he looked around the room with a sigh, "Mike can have the rest."

Then going to the window, he stood looking out upon the calm, moonlit scene, which for many years had been the only home he had known.

"This is my last night here," he soliloquized, "my work here is done. After to-morrow, Everard Houston will need me no longer, everything in which I can render him assistance is now done, and his friends will afford him all needed protection. Lyle has found her own, her future is provided for. The wrongs which I have witnessed for years in silence, will be righted without any assistance of mine. There is nothing more for me to do, and to-morrow I will start forth on the old, wandering life again."

His head dropped lower; he was thinking deeply.

"He said the old home was open, and would always be what it had been in the past. Home! What would that not mean now, after all these years! But that was long ago. I am dead to them now,—dead and forgotten. They will be happy with their new-found daughter, and Everard will be to them as a son, their happiness will be complete, and I will not mar it by any reminders of the wretched past."

He glanced upward at the surrounding peaks.

"To-morrow I go forth again into the mountains,—those towers of refuge and strength,—and in their soothing solitudes I shall once more find peace!"

Then he retired. But to Jack, resting for the last time in his cabin home, to those then peacefully sleeping in the little mining camp, or to the others speeding westward through the night, on the wings of steam, there came no vision, no thought of what the morrow was, in reality, to bring.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

Tuesday morning dawned,—a day never to be forgotten in the history of the little mining camp, or in the lives of many outsiders as well.

A strange thrill of subdued excitement ran through the little group, assembled before breakfast in the porch, as they realized that the day to which they had looked forward with varying anticipations had at last arrived; and there was, unconsciously, a look of watchful expectancy on every face.

Even Nature herself seemed in sympathy with them. For a few days the heat had been intense, devouring with its scorching breath every vestige of verdure on the mountain sides and foothills, and leaving them dull and dun. On this particular morning the heat seemed more terrible than ever, and there was not a breath of air stirring to cool the oppressive atmosphere. The earth and sky were suffused with a bright, red light, which gradually died away into a dim, purplish haze, through which the sun ascended like a ball of fire; while every blade and leaf hung motionless, as if awaiting breathlessly the coming of some great catastrophe.

"This portends a storm," said Houston, as he watched the strange phenomena.

"Yes," added Morton Rutherford, "an electric storm, and, if I am not mistaken, a very severe one."

"How strange!" exclaimed Leslie, in a low tone, to Lyle, "everything is so hushed and still; it seems as if the elements, like ourselves, were just waiting."

"I don't like it," Lyle answered, "it seems ominous," and she shuddered visibly.

There was little breakfast eaten that morning, and the group of friends adjourned to the porch on the pretext of watching the weather, thereby attracting the attention of Haight, who still remained at the table.

"What's in the wind now, I wonder," he soliloquized.



"There was some kind of excitement here last evening, and everybody seems on the qui vive this morning. I guess I'd better look into this," and calling Minty to him, he gave her a quarter, with his most insinuating smile, saying in low tones:

"You find out to-day, if you can, whether there's anything unusual going on among those folks out there, and let me know."

She pocketed the money with her customary giggle, as she responded, nodding her head emphatically, "You jest betcher life I will."

Haight then departed for the mills, and Houston soon after left for the mines, while an hour or two later Morton Rutherford, taking one of the horses, rode leisurely in the direction of the Y, where he was to await a telegram from Van Dorn, immediately upon the arrival of the Eastern train at Silver City.

In due time the message came, in cipher:

"Party arrived all right; over on evening train."

To which Rutherford replied as follows:

"All quiet here. Will wire later if anything occurs."

Then starting on his return up the canyon, he urged his horse forward with all possible speed, conscious that the most critical time was now approaching, and fully decided regarding his course of action on reaching the camp.

At the mines, Houston found everything progressing as usual, the work going forward in the same unending, monotonous routine.

At the Silver City office of the mining company, however, the greatest excitement was prevailing. Having been utterly unable to obtain any clue as to the whereabouts or the intentions of Mr. Cameron, the mining company, to guard against being taken wholly by surprise, had devised a new scheme. Every morning had found Mr. Wilson seated on the early train which left Silver City for the East at five A. M., and which was side-

tracked at a small station about ninety miles distant, to give the right of way to the regular, West-bound Pacific Express. Here both trains stopped for about fifteen minutes, affording Mr. Wilson ample opportunity to pass through the West-bound train, and satisfy himself whether or not there were any old acquaintances aboard. Failing to find the party for whom he was seeking, he himself returned to Silver City on the same train.

On this particular morning, however, upon cautiously entering one of the sleepers, he had seen, seated in one section, apparently in close consultation, three gentlemen, one of whom he immediately recognized as Mr. Cameron. Opposite and facing him, was an elderly man whose face Mr. Wilson was unable to see, but the back of whose head presented a severely judicial appearance, while at Mr. Cameron's right was seated the English expert who had come out early in the season with Mr. Winters' party. Evidently, Mr. Cameron was en route for the mines.

Mr. Wilson had hastily retreated, and, stopping at the little station only just long enough to send a wire to the company, had returned to the east-bound train, to continue his journey indefinitely, which had not been a part of the programme prepared by the officers of the said company in common with their various other plans. But Mr. Wilson had suddenly come to the conclusion that there were other localities better suited to his health just at that particular time than the great and glorious North West which had so long been his favorite theme, and whose praises he had so persistently sung.

It was about ten o'clock when Mr. Wilson's telegram, announcing his discovery, reached the Silver City office, creating general consternation. After a hurried consultation, numerous papers and documents were hastily stored in a private vault belonging to the officers of the company, a dispatch was sent out over their private wire to Haight, informing him of the situation and giving certain instructions; after which Mr. Blaisdell and a confidential clerk betook themselves to the depot to await the arrival of the Pacific Express. Concealing themselves among the crowd, they watched Mr. Cameron and his as-

sociates as they left the train, and having waited till they were safely ensconced within a carriage, ready to start for their hotel, Mr. Blaisdell then ordered his clerk to take another carriage and follow them, remaining at the hotel long enough to ascertain all he possibly could concerning their movements, after which he was to report at the office.

Turning once more toward the crowd, Mr. Blaisdell expected to meet Mr. Wilson, but to his astonishment and perplexity, he was nowhere to be seen. From the conductor, however, who had thought Mr. Wilson's conduct rather peculiar, he learned the facts in the case.

"Yes, sir," said that individual in conclusion, swinging himself on to the departing train, "if that's the man you're looking for, he's vamoosed sure, and judging by the way he got aboard that train, he'll be traveling for some time to come."

Great was the indignation of the remaining officers of the company on learning of the sudden departure of their worthy president, and it was not lessened when, upon investigation at the office, it was discovered that Mr. Wilson had not only relieved the company of his presence, but of all the available funds in their private vault as well, which, at that time, happened to be considerable; nevertheless, for obvious reasons, it was decided best to say nothing about it for a few days.

The clerk, on his return from the hotel, stated that none of Mr. Cameron's party had registered, but had gone immediately to their rooms, where they had ordered a private lunch served. He had seen nothing more of them, but had seen Van Dorn there, however, and upon inquiry had learned that he had been there since the preceding day, apparently waiting for some one, evidently this party, as, immediately upon their arrival, he had sent a cipher dispatch to some one at the Y; and one of the party had been heard to inquire quite particularly at what time the evening train would leave Silver City for Cokeville, a small station near the Y.

It was evident that Van Dorn was in league with Mr. Cameron's party, and that they intended going out to the camp that evening; prompt action was necessary. A

message was sent to Haight, and after his reply, it was decided that desperate measures were also necessary.

While Morton Rutherford was leisurely riding toward the Y, Haight, sitting at his desk in his dingy, stifling office, suddenly heard his name clicked by the little telegraphic instrument near him. Having given the usual signal in return, the following message came over the wire with peremptory haste:

"Get everything in readiness at once; Cameron coming on eastern train with mining expert and attorney. Get everything ready for the final touch and await further instructions in about two hours."

Haight sprang to his feet, and calling one of the men, ordered, "Send Maverick to me as quickly as you can."

In a few moments the slouching figure of Maverick stood in the door-way.

"Come in, Jim, and shut that door," said Haight, in a quick, decisive tone that Maverick knew meant business.

"Jim, in what shape is the powder in those mines? How long would it take to get everything ready for action?"

Maverick's eyes gleamed; here evidently was to be a piece of work such as he enjoyed!

"The powder's all there," he replied, "all there, jest in the right places, an' all there is ter do is ter lay the trains 'round there an' fix a few fuses; 'twouldn't take more'n half an hour, or sech a matter."

"Think you could get it all done at noon, while the men are away?"

"Yes, easy."

"Very well, now listen; you are to get everything ready so that it will be nothing but 'a touch and a go,' as soon as I say the word, understand? Get everything ready this noon, give the men warning that there's going to be some blasting, and then, as quick as you've had your dinner, you be around here prompt, and stay within sight of this room till I send you word to quit. You know the rest, what directions Blaisdell left the last time he was here: you know what you're to wait for, and if you get a signal from me, you know what you're to do."

"You bet I do, and I'll do a damned good job, too," Maverick replied, with a grin; "but what's the signal, boss?"

"Let me see, I want something you'll recognize without any trouble, and that nobody else would notice, or think meant anything. Where will you be?"

"Out there, behind them rocks; I can see your winders plain from there."

"Yes, but if I made you any signal there, or put anything in the window, others would see it as well as yourself."

"I'll tell you what, boss," said Maverick, glancing at the window on the right of Haight's desk, where hung an old, dilapidated shade, which had been lowered its full length in an effort to keep out the intolerable heat, "you let that there shade hang jest as it is till you want me, and when I see that yanked up, I'll know what it means, and you'll hear from me in jest about ten minits at the latest. But say, boss, what's all this racket about, anyhow? Some o' them eastern chaps comin' out here?"

"That's none of your business, Jim," said Haight in a joking way, "you attend to what you've been told, and don't meddle with what don't concern you."

"Is old Cameron comin' out here?" persisted Maverick, with an expression of fear and hatred combined, visible in his countenance.

"Cameron!" exclaimed Haight, with a slight start, and wondering at Maverick's appearance, "What do you know about him?"

"I know he owns these 'ere mines, damn him!" answered Maverick doggedly.

"Do you! Well, that's enough, go along, you're not interested in Cameron."

"Ain't I though!" said Maverick with a snarl and an oath, the hatred and wrath increasing in his face; "Me'n him has got an old score to settle yet. I only wisht he was a goin' ter be in them mines this afternoon. When's he comin'?"

"I don't know," answered Haight shortly, "probably before very long though."

"When you git word he's comin' I wan'ter know it, that's all," growled Maverick.

"Well," said Haight, beginning to lose his temper, "when you see that curtain raised, you may know he's coming, and pretty damned quick too; now get out of the way, and attend to your business. Remember I've told you to give the men warning."

"Yes," said Maverick, with a leer, "'specially the new superintendent, you'd like me ter give 'im an extra warnin' I s'pose."

There was a corresponding leer on Haight's face, as he replied with a peculiar grimace,

"You've had your orders; if you are particularly anxious to give anybody an extra warning, go ahead!"

With a low, cruel laugh, Maverick withdrew, and a few moments later was shuffling along in the direction of the mines intent upon the work of destruction assigned to him, his face distorted with mingled fear and rage, his usually dull eyes gleaming with the fires of revenge.

Haight hastened to the house to take a hurried dinner, and having learned from Minty that Morton Rutherford had gone to the Y, he again charged her to immediately report to him whatever she might learn, and returned to the office to await further instructions from the company.

To Houston, constantly on the alert for danger signals, Haight's hurried and excited manner was the first indication of approaching trouble. It was evident that the company had received some inkling of impending danger, but of the extent of their information, or the nature of their communications with Haight, he had no means of ascertaining. Stating that he wished to see Morton Rutherford immediately upon his return, and that he would be at the Yankee Boy, near the entrance to the incline shaft, he hastened back to the mines at an earlier hour than usual.

Finding Jack and Mike who had already returned, he told them of his surmises, and arranged a set of signals,—a certain number of blows on the rocks above them,—whereby he would give them warning if he found indications of immediate danger, upon which they were to make

their escape in an opposite direction, by means of a tunnel, designated as tunnel No. 3, where he would speedily join them.

On returning to the shaft, he found the majority of the men returning to their work as usual, Maverick having given them no warning, partly through his own cowardice, and partly through a determination that Houston should have no hint of what was to follow.

Meanwhile, the long threatened storm was rapidly approaching with signs of unusual severity. Heavy clouds had obscured the sun and were, moment by moment, growing denser and blacker, while the heat was, if possible, more intense than before. There was that ominous calm that presages the coming of the tempest, while the air grew oppressive almost to suffocation. In the distant canyons, far up among the mountains, could be heard the muffled roaring of the wind, while the branches began to sway occasionally under the first hot breath of the approaching hurricane, which seemed like a blast from a furnace.

On through the fast-gathering storm rode Morton Rutherford, urging forward his foam-covered horse, feeling by a certain, unerring intuition, that that ride through the winding canyon was a race between life and death. Having reached the camp, and left his dripping, panting horse at the stables, he walked rapidly on to the house, arriving shortly after Houston had left, and just in time to meet Maverick, hurrying to the house for a bit of food, his work of preparation having taken longer than he anticipated.

One look at his malignant, demon-like face convinced Rutherford that he had arrived none too early, and that his own plans must be put in execution very soon.

Pausing only long enough to exchange a few words with his brother and the ladies, in reply to their eager questions, he hurried on to the mines, he and they all unaware of a figure skulking behind him, in the fast-deepening gloom, in the direction of the mills. From an open window, aided by the peculiar condition of the atmosphere in those altitudes before a storm, which trans-

mits the slightest sound with wonderful distinctness, Minty had overheard most of the conversation, and was hastening to fulfill her contract with Haight.

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#### CHAPTER XLIV.

Morton Rutherford was not the only one who had observed the expression on Maverick's face. To Lyle it seemed she had never seen such venomous malignity as was in the look which he gave her. Stepping into the dining room a few moments after Morton had left, she heard imprecations and curses mingled with her own name and that of Mr. Cameron, and realized at once that their secret was known; then, as he hastily left the house, she heard a few words of bitter hatred which would have no special meaning to his wife, but which Lyle, knowing what Houston and his friends had been anticipating for the last few days, readily understood.

The wind was now raging down the canyon with terrific force, but Lyle had but one thought, to warn those whom she loved and save them from danger. Catching up a light wrap which she threw about her shoulders, she rushed out of the house, passing Miss Gladden and Ned, who were in the porch watching the storm, and who tried to detain her.

"Lyle, what is the matter? Where are you going?" they cried.

"To the mines!" Lyle answered, raising her voice above the roar of the storm; "They are going to fire the mines, and they are all there, Morton and Everard and Jack. I must warn them if I can!"

"Lyle, come back!" shouted Ned, "let me go!"

She shook her head; "I must go, I know the mines," she cried, and turning ran down the road, battling with the terrific wind, and was out of sight, almost before they realized what had happened.

Meanwhile, Morton Rutherford had found Houston without difficulty. "They are coming, Everard," he



announced, in a low tone, "they will be here to-night. What are the indications here?"

"I judge from Haight's manner, that word of some kind has been received from headquarters, but just what is to be done, or whether there is any immediate danger, I cannot yet tell."

"I am going over to Haight's office for a few moments," said Rutherford, "I may catch some message from the company that will show us the situation."

"Just what I was intending to suggest," said Houston.

"You will remain here until I come back?"

"Yes, unless I should detect some certain signs of danger; in that case I shall warn the men, and shall start for tunnel No. 3, that part of the mine will be safe for a while, in any event."

"Very well, you will probably hear from me within twenty or thirty minutes," and Rutherford started for the mills.

Haight, on returning to the office from dinner, waited some little time for the expected dispatch. At last it came:

"Cameron just arrived with Englishman, Lindlay, and attorney; going out to the mines on evening train. Are at Arlington Hotel, Van Dorn at same hotel and in telegraphic communication with some one at the Y. There is a conspiracy somewhere; what do you know? Answer at once; is everything ready?"

He was still studying the contents of the telegram, wondering just what the conspiracy might mean, when Minty slyly entered, and by means of the information she had secured, furnished him the needed key to the situation. In a few moments the following answer was returned:

"The truth is out; have just discovered Houston is Cameron's nephew, out here in his interests; Van Dorn et al. working with him. Cameron coming out to-night for the grand coup. Everything is ready awaiting your orders."

Just as the message was sent, Maverick passed on his

way to his post, and seeing him, Haight stepped to the door and called him:

"I say, Jim, I've learned the truth at last about that superintendent of ours, damn him! You seemed so interested in old Cameron this morning, I thought you'd like to know that it has turned out that this Houston is his nephew."

"Houston, old man Cameron's nephew!" gasped Maverick, with a terrible oath, and growing fairly livid, "How'd ye get onto that?"

"No matter how, Jim, but it seems he's been out here all summer getting onto some of our little business ways and reporting to the old man, and now he's got the old fellow out here to see the fun. Never mind, Jim, I guess the fun will be on the other side after all. I'll attend to my business and you'll attend to yours, but I thought you'd go at it with a better relish after this little piece of news."

Maverick passed on his way, regardless of the storm, incapable of coherent speech, muttering oaths and curses intermingled with the vilest epithets, Haight watching him with a grim smile for a few moments. Then going back to his office, he had but just reseated himself at his desk, when Morton Rutherford entered the outer room.

"Damn him! what is he sneaking around here for?" Haight soliloquized, at the same time hastily transferring a revolver from his desk to his pocket, "I'll spoil that mug of his if he attempts any funny business here."

This movement was seen by Rutherford, who was watching him closely, but he appeared to take no notice of it and entered the office as usual, with a civil greeting to Haight. The latter sprang to his feet, taking his position close by the shaded window, his right hand grasping the revolver in his pocket.

Rutherford's lips curled with scorn and contempt as he looked at Haight; he saw there could be no semblance of civility between them, it was to be open war.

"You are a coward!" he said.

"And you are a sneak," Haight hissed in reply, "prying around here when you had better be minding your own business."

"Let me tell you that I am attending to my own business, and you will find before you are much older, that I have more right here than you."

For a moment Haight hesitated, astonished by Rutherford's words and manner, then was about to make some reply, when the click of the instrument attracted his attention. Keeping his eye on Rutherford, he gave the answering signal with his left hand, then listened intently for the message. It came, containing the final orders and the farewell words of the Silver City office:

"Send the mines to hell, and Houston and his crowd with them. Look out for yourself. Good-bye."

In his interest in the message, Haight seemed, for an instant, to have partially forgotten Rutherford's presence, his eyes dropped toward the instrument, and in that instant, Rutherford cleared the space between them at a bound, gripping Haight firmly with one hand, while with the other he knocked the revolver which Haight had hastily drawn, half way across the room. With a single blow he knocked Haight to the floor, partially stunning him, but as he regained his senses, he rolled over towards the window, and with a strength born of desperation, struggled to his knees, and before Rutherford realized what he was trying to do, the shade flew upward to the top of the window. Even then, Rutherford would have thought little of it, had not Haight betrayed himself by a leer of fiendish triumph. In an instant Rutherford understood that it had been some pre-arranged signal.

"You cowardly villain!" he exclaimed, and pausing only long enough to give him a blow which left him unconscious on the floor, he rushed forth into the darkness and fury of the storm, in the direction of the mines.

As he did so, he stumbled against a small boy, running even more swiftly in the same direction.

"Mister, Mister Houston! is that you?" rang out Bulldog's voice, above the storm.

"No, my boy, I am going to find Mr. Houston, to save him if I can."

"Oh, sir, let me go! I know about it, they're goin' to fire the mines, I heerd Jake say so, and I was a goin' to find Mister Houston myself; I'll get there quicker, 'n I know the mine better 'n you."

"But, my boy, you risk your own life," said Rutherford.

"Never mind that, sir; Mister Houston, he's been my friend, 'n his life's worth more'n mine anyhow; I'll risk it," and he was already rushing on ahead, shouting back to Rutherford, "You go to the tunnels, sir, you can help him there."

"Tell him the signal has been given!" called Rutherford, and Bull-dog, swinging his ragged hat in reply, sped swiftly on through the raging wind.

Rutherford paused for a moment, then started in the direction of the tunnels. At that instant, Lyle, still struggling against the fury of the wind, had just reached the ground surrounding the mines; in a few seconds more she would have been within the fatal boundary line, but Bull-dog's voice, as he rushed past, warned her back.

"Go back, go back, Miss Lyle! they've given the signal to fire the mines, I'm goin' to warn 'em; don't be afraid, I'll save 'em, Mister Houston and Jack," and with these words, he rushed on, disappearing through the incline shaft.

Lyle retreated a few steps, and then paused, looking wildly about her, dreading, expecting, she scarcely knew what.

Suddenly the darkness seemed divided by a blinding flash, which spread into a sheet of flame, enveloping her within its lurid folds, while peal after peal of deafening thunder crashed and roared about her, and the lightning flashed and gleamed till it seemed as if earth and sky were commingled in one mass of flaming combat.

Scarcely had the blinding flashes died in darkness, and the reverberations of the thunder still echoed and re-echoed among the surrounding mountains, when the earth began to rock and vibrate beneath her feet; there was the sound of a terrific explosion, she felt for an instant a strange sensation as if floating through the air,—

then she knew nothing more; she had been thrown to the ground, unconscious, by the shock.

Meanwhile, down the rough, narrow road, leading to the mines, Leslie Gladden and Ned Rutherford were making their way, having started immediately after Lyle, but unaccustomed to the furious mountain storms and unfamiliar with the road, they made slow progress in the darkness and tempest.

"Miss Gladden, this is too hard for you," said Ned, as they paused once, gasping for breath, "I don't believe it is safe either, you ought never to have come."

"What do I care for difficulty or danger?" she replied, "Think of Lyle going through this storm alone; I only pray she may not have been too late!"

Scarcely had she finished speaking, when, without an instant's warning, the timber through which they were passing suddenly seemed one mass of blinding flame, while almost simultaneously came the deafening crash of the thunder.

"Great Heavens! that must have struck awfully near us!" exclaimed Ned, but no cry escaped from Leslie's lips, as, shuddering, she clasped his arm more closely and struggled bravely on.

It was not until a few seconds later, when there came the sound of the terrible explosion, followed by the bursting and crashing of the rocks, while the ground quivered and trembled as though shaken by an earthquake, that, for an instant, her courage failed, and with a low cry, she sank to the ground, shivering with horror. But only for an instant, and then she rose to her feet, dizzy and trembling from the shock, but brave and determined as ever.

"Come," she said hoarsely, "we must hasten; perhaps we can help them in some way, even if we are too late to save them."

Speechless from a horrible, sickening realization of all which that terrible shock might mean to those whom they were striving to save, Ned silently helped her forward. They had gone but a few steps, when there suddenly burst upon the dark and stormy heavens a dull, red glare, which grew brighter moment by moment, and on

emerging from the timber into the open ground, a frightful scene met their gaze.

Dense clouds of smoke were pouring from the shafts of the nearest mine, while, at a little distance, could be seen the mills, their whole interior already ablaze with light. In that end of the buildings containing the sorting rooms and Haight's office, the fire was raging, having come in contact with quantities of chemicals which had increased its fury.

"Great Caesar!" ejaculated Ned, "the mills were struck, and are on fire."

But Leslie uttered a sharp cry, and ran swiftly down the path to where Lyle lay unconscious, followed quickly by Ned.

"Poor child, poor child!" she moaned, "oh, merciful heaven, she came too late, and they are all lost!"

Then, as she knelt beside the unconscious form, there came another terrific explosion, which seemed to jar even the rocks about them to their very foundations, while from the already smoking shafts, the flames now issued, towering higher and higher, and adding new terror to the scene.

Men were seen running from all directions, from the distant groups of mines, rushing to the burning mills, where the little fire corps belonging to the camp, were already engaged in a futile battle with the flames; but around the Yankee Boy mine there was no sign of life.

The rain now began to descend in torrents, and the first dash of the storm seemed to revive Lyle, whom Leslie and Ned had raised to a sitting posture in their efforts to restore her to consciousness. Slowly she opened her eyes with a bewildered look, then springing to her feet, still weak and trembling, but resolute and determined, she gazed about her at the flaming shafts and burning mills, and suddenly cried,

"Oh, I can remember now! I remember it all, it has come back to me,—the terrible wreck, the burning cars all around us, and my mother crushed in the wreck; then the people carried us out and they put me down beside her, lying so white and still, and then,—then that villain

came and took me away,—I can see it all,” and she shuddered.

Then looking at Leslie and Ned, who were watching her with startled faces, she seemed trying to recall the present situation. Before either of them could speak, however, there came the report of another explosion, more distant and deeper underground than any that had yet occurred, and the sound seemed to bring back to Lyle the memory of her last moments of consciousness before the first terrible shock, while the faces of her companions were blanched with terror.

“I know now,” she exclaimed quickly, “I was too late, but Bull-dog warned them, and they are probably safe; we must go to the tunnels, they will make their escape there, and we may help them.”

She ran swiftly down the path leading the way, while they followed only too gladly, their hearts filled with new hope.

The men, finding it impossible to check the flames at the mills, were flocking in the direction of the Yankee group of mines. Fearing, however, to approach very near the scene of danger, they gathered in groups here and there, while a company of wretched women, the wives and daughters of the few married men who worked in the fated mines, ran hither and thither, sobbing and wringing their hands in their agony of fear and suspense for their own loved ones. Seeing Lyle leading the way to the tunnels, they all, men and women, followed in the same direction.

The fury of the storm had passed; a heavy rain was still falling, but the wind had subsided, and the clouds had lifted and were already breaking away.

Arriving at the tunnels, they found a crowd of men, among them a number who had made their escape from the mines. The hearts of Ned Rutherford and Lyle throbbed with joy as they descried Morton standing among the crowd, but Lyle's heart sank again with sickening dread as she saw no signs of Everard Houston or of Jack, while Leslie Gladden moaned in despair. Morton Rutherford was unhurt, except for a few bruises from flying rocks, and he was pleading with some of the men,

and offering large sums of money to any one or two who would go with him into the tunnel in search of Houston and some of the missing men.

"Mr. Houston told me that this part of the mine would be safe for some time," he shouted, "and I will pay a thousand dollars to any one who will go with me as guide."

For a moment no one responded, then one of the men who had escaped, spoke,

"No sir, I wouldn't go back in that there mine for five thousand dollars, I'm out, an' I stays out," while another added, "'Twouldn't be of no use, sir; mos' likely he was caught in some o' them cave-ins; he stopped to give us all warnin' an' he was about the last one to start."

"Cowards!" exclaimed Lyle, stepping forth among them with blazing eyes, "he risked his life to save yours, and you will not even try to save him. Morton," she added, turning toward her lover, "I know every step of the tunnels, and I will go with you."

The men slunk back like whipped curs, but made no response. The miners employed by the company throughout this group of mines were of the lowest class, and they were none too friendly to Houston, while the better class of men employed in the other mines were not familiar with these workings.

Morton Rutherford advanced to meet Lyle; "My darling," he said, in low tones, "I cannot allow you to subject yourself to danger."

"I would rather share the danger with you," she replied proudly, "besides we must save them."

"I will go, too," said Ned eagerly, "I surely can help."

Lyle was about to suggest that he remain with Miss Gladden, but Leslie herself interposed.

"No, no, I do not need him," she said earnestly, "I would suffer no more waiting alone, and he may do much good."

At that instant, two young men from another group of mines stepped forward; "If you please, sir," said one of them, "we don't want no money, and we can't act as guides, not being acquainted with the lay of things



around here, but we'd like to help you, for we like Mr. Houston, and we're his friends."

Their offer was gladly accepted, and preparations were hastily and silently made by the little party. Wet cloths and sponges were fastened across the lower portion of their faces, to prevent their inhaling the smoke and gases, while ropes were securely tied about their waists, the ends of which were to be held by persons on the outside. A frequent jerking of the rope would assure those outside that all was right in the tunnel, but a suspension of the jerking would indicate that that person had been overcome by the gases, and he would be immediately drawn out to the fresh air, by those at the outer end of the line.

Pausing only for a bright smile of encouragement to Leslie, Lyle led the way into the tunnel, followed by Morton and Ned, the two miners bringing up the rear, and all disappeared in the subterranean darkness.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

When Bull-dog's voice rang out above the storm, with its warning to Lyle, Houston, standing near the entrance of the shaft, alert, watchful for the first indication of danger, heard the words distinctly and acted instantly.

Having given the usual danger signal, he shouted, "To the tunnels, boys, for your lives! The mine has been fired, go to the tunnels!"

On returning from giving the agreed signal to Jack and Mike, he heard Bull-dog's voice above him in the shaft, calling his name and shouting the warning.

"Come, my boy," shouted Houston in return, "we'll start for the tunnels."

"Yes sir, I'm a comin', I know the way, but don't you wait fer me 'cause you may git catched."

"I shall not leave you, Bull-dog, we'll go together," Houston answered, waiting for the little figure gliding swiftly toward him in the darkness.

Suddenly the rocks by which they were surrounded began to quiver and vibrate; there was a deafening roar fol-

lowed by a terrific crash, and an instant later, a mass of loosened rock was tearing its way through the shaft.

"Cling to the wall, Bull-dog," shouted Houston, at the same time seizing a projecting ledge with a vise-like grip, and swinging himself upward, where he hung by his hands and wrists. It was a horrible position, but his powerful, athletic muscles bore the strain until the grinding, tearing mass had passed, and he dropped, scratched and bruised, but otherwise unhurt, to the ground.

As he did so, he heard a faint moan, and hastening in the direction from whence it came, found Bull-dog, who, unable to spring high enough to escape the passing rocks, had been swept along and partially buried under the debris that followed.

"My boy, are you hurt?" asked Houston, bending over him in the darkness, and removing as fast as possible the mass of crushed and broken rock under which he lay.

"Not much, I guess," replied the little, familiar voice, in tones that tried to be brave and cheery, but which quivered with pain, "I tried to hold on, Mister Houston, but that big rock was a little too much fer me."

As Houston at last freed him, the little fellow tried to rise, but sank quickly back, with an involuntary cry:

"I guess I'm done fer—Mister Houston," he gasped faintly, "but I don't care—if you only—get out safe."

The smoke and gases were now pouring down the shaft, and Houston realized that there was no time to be lost. Very tenderly he lifted the little form in his arms, and began, as rapidly as possible, the descent of the shaft, groping his way amid the rocks, toward the cut leading to the tunnels, through which he hoped to escape.

The motion roused Bull-dog who had fainted. "Mister Houston," he cried, "don't mind me—I wanted to save you, and I guess you can make it yet, if you hurry and don't bother with me; I won't mind bein' left here, 'cause I'll know then that you're safe."

"Don't you worry, my boy," replied Houston, and his own voice trembled, "we'll reach daylight all right, but we'll reach it together; I'll never leave you."

There was no reply except a contented, confiding nestling of the little head against Houston's shoulder; then,

as a second explosion thundered above them, jarring the foundations of the rocks once more, he murmured drowsily, "There she goes again," and sank into unconsciousness.

The smoke was now so stifling that Houston was obliged to go upon his hands and knees, carrying Bulldog in one arm; his progress was necessarily slow, but to his great joy he succeeded in finding the cut leading to tunnel No. 3; then, to his horror, he discovered that the entrance was blocked by a mass of earth and loose rock which had caved in.

Laying Bulldog carefully down, he examined the obstruction, and found there was a small opening at the top, and that the mass was of such a character that it could easily be removed with pick and shovel, but he had nothing. With desperate energy, he began tearing away the earth and rocks with his hands, then to his intense relief, after a few moments' work, he heard voices on the other side. Houston listened; it was Jack and Mike, who, having waited for him in the tunnel, expecting him to join them immediately, had become alarmed at his non-appearance, and were returning with their picks and shovels, which they had taken out with them, calling him and searching for him.

Houston shouted, and they hastened to the rescue, and the entrance was very quickly cleared sufficiently for Houston to crawl through. Before passing through, himself, however, he lifted Bulldog, and carefully handed the unconscious form to Jack.

"Who is this?" the latter asked in surprise.

"Bull-dog, the little hero who has saved our lives by sacrificing his own," Houston replied.

"Is he still living?"

"Yes, but unconscious."

Silently and tenderly Jack handed the little fellow to the tender-hearted Mike, who at once started toward the tunnel with his burden, while Jack turned to assist Houston.

At that instant, there came the third explosion, which was farther underground than either of those preceding. It was but a short distance from them, and an immense

scale of overhanging rock quivered for an instant, then fell, throwing its fragments in every direction. Mike, at the distance which he had already gained, escaped unhurt. Jack and Houston sprang in opposite directions, but the pieces of flying rock overtook them, though they escaped being buried beneath the mass as it fell. They were both thrown to the ground; Houston staggered to his feet, badly bruised and cut and his left arm broken, but Jack remained motionless.

Hearing Houston's call, Mike quickly returned, and he and Houston found that Jack was still alive, though badly injured about the head. The full extent of his injuries they realized they would be unable to ascertain until they could reach the surface. Together they consulted as to the best course to pursue. Mike wished to go back and get help immediately, but Houston insisted that they must first remove Jack and little Bull-dog as speedily as possible, as there was danger of other explosions following now in rapid succession, and also danger from the smoke and gases of the gradually approaching flames, which were consuming the timbering of the various shafts, and would at length communicate with the tunnels also.

Instructing Mike to lay Jack's head across his shoulder, Houston then clasped his right arm closely about Jack's neck and shoulders. Mike, carrying Bull-dog on one arm, with the other was to lift Jack underneath the knees; and in this way they started for the tunnel.

Houston suffered excruciating pain from the arm hanging helpless at his side, but he traveled forward without a murmur, scarcely conscious of his own suffering in his anxiety for Jack. The cut was comparatively short, but their progress was slow.

Nearly overcome by the suffocating gases and the smoke, and faint from pain and loss of blood, Houston had just staggered into the tunnel, when he heard the welcome sound of the voices of Lyle and of Morton Rutherford, and knew that they were saved.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

Meanwhile, the work of destruction went swiftly forward, explosions following in quick succession and with terrific force, throughout the Yankee group of mines, and the adjoining claims; while the flames from the burning shafts were rivaled by those which spread from the mills to the shops, storehouses and stables, and finally, to the miners' quarters, till all were speedily reduced to ashes.

Around the entrance to tunnel No. 3, a large crowd had gathered, not only from the various mines, but also from neighboring mining camps, all anxiously awaiting the return of the rescue party.

At last they appeared. The first to emerge into daylight, was Ned Rutherford, bearing in his arms the crushed and mutilated form of little Bull-dog. Behind him came Houston, partially supported by one of the young miners and by Lyle, his left arm hanging at his side, his face deathly white beneath the blood and grime, but firm and dauntless as ever. As he stepped forth into the light, a wild cheer rose on the air, but Houston, raising his right hand with a deprecatory motion, silently pointed backward toward the tunnel, where, slowly emerging into view of the crowd, were Morton Rutherford and Mike, carrying, with the assistance of the other miner, the bleeding and unconscious form of Jack.

The cheers were hushed, and the crowd silently surged about Houston and the two motionless, unconscious forms laid side by side upon the ground, their heads pillowed upon the rough jackets of the men, folded and tenderly placed beneath them by the hands of Lyle and Leslie, the latter half fainting with excitement.

The men crowding about Houston congratulated him with a hearty hand-clasp, unaccompanied by words, except for an occasional inquiry as to his own condition.

"I am all right," he said in reply to the latter, "my arm

is nothing, the merest trifle; my only thought is for the two lives which I fear have been sacrificed for mine."

Anxiously he bent above the prostrate forms. Jack's head was frightfully gashed, and his heavy, labored breathing indicated that his brain was already affected. Houston spoke a word to Morton Rutherford, who quickly withdrew, and taking the swiftest horse in camp, was soon speeding down the road to the Y, in a second race against death.

Houston next knelt beside Bull-dog; a faint fluttering about the heart was the only sign of life. The little waif was well known among the mining camps of that vicinity, and there were few dry eyes in the crowd as Houston told the story of his heroism.

Houston saw the end was very near, and gently slipped his right arm under Bull-dog's head. Slowly the little fellow opened his eyes, looking, with a happy smile, into the face bending so tenderly over him. At that instant, the sun, bursting through the clouds, threw a ray of golden light in shining benediction across the little white face. His eyes brightened still more; "We're safe!" he whispered joyously. There was a slight quiver, and the little form was still.

The sun, shining as brightly and serenely as though storms were unknown, looked down into that beautiful canyon upon a strange scene of ruin, desolation and death. Amid the wreck and debris of the explosions, lay the little hero who had saved so many lives that day, upon his face a child-like smile which it had never worn in life; while farther on down the canyon, beside the smoking embers of the milling plant, lay the one whose signal had wrought all this destruction. The men, rushing into the burning mills, had found the electrical apparatus in ruins, as though torn to pieces by giant hands, and beside it upon the floor lay Haight, a ghastly sight, his face blackened and distorted, his right arm and side seared and shriveled, by the mighty servant who had suddenly burst its fetters.

Slowly and tenderly Jack was borne to the house, and laid in the room which had been Houston's, which Lyle had made ready for him with loving care, her tears fall-

ing fast as she recalled his farewell of the preceding night. To the house came also his two faithful friends, Mike and Rex, for the little cabin was no more, Jack had indeed spent his last night beneath its roof, though the succeeding night, to which he had looked forward, was far different from his anticipations.

Days afterward, his gripsack, packed with such care on that last night in the cabin, was found by Houston concealed among the rocks, where Jack had hidden it on the morning of that eventful day, intending, when his work was done, to set forth upon his wandering life once more.

Morton Rutherford, on arriving at the Y, had sent the following cipher dispatch to Van Dorn:

"Come out on special at once. The mines have been fired by telegraphic orders from Silver City office. Everard badly cut and arm broken, but not seriously injured. Jack but just alive. Bring surgeons and nurse as quickly as possible."

Having sent this message, and finding there was a very good physician at the Y, he sent him at once to the camp, to remain there until the surgeons should arrive, doing meantime all in his power to relieve the sufferers. Then giving orders for one of the company's men to take his horse, and replace it with a fresh one, Morton returned to the station to await Van Dorn's reply.

At the house, Jack was being cared for by Mike and one of the older miners, who had had considerable experience in nursing, Houston doing everything which his crippled condition and the intense pain he was suffering, would permit.

On the arrival of the physician from the Y, he first visited Jack, and leaving directions to be carried out for his temporary relief, next attended to the setting of Houston's arm and the dressing of his wounds. The operation required some time, but at last it was completed, and Houston returned to Jack's room.

The room had been darkened, and in accordance with the physician's directions, Jack's beard had been shaven and his hair closely cut, to relieve his head as much as possible. His breathing was more natural, but he lay quiet and motionless as before.

As Houston approached the bed in the dim light, he scarcely recognized his friend, so great was the change in his appearance, but as he drew nearer, he started visibly. Something in the smooth face and closely clipped head seemed wonderfully familiar, and carried him back to the days when he had first entered his uncle's home. Bending over him for an instant, he scanned the features more closely. It was enough! The face with its patrician features carved in such perfect beauty, though lined by sorrow, was the face of his cousin,—his boyish hero and ideal.

With a quick, dry sob, Houston turned from the bedside, more deeply moved than any of his associates had ever seen him.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, in low tones, "it is Guy Cameron! my cousin Guy!" and bending over the unconscious form once more, while the great tears coursed slowly down his face, he murmured:

"Guy, dear old fellow, and you have known me all this time! God grant this has not come too late!"

With a low cry, Lyle had sprung to Houston's side, while Leslie and Ned Rutherford followed, and the others looked on in mute wonder and astonishment. Her quick ear had caught the name.

"What name did you say?" she cried eagerly, "Did you say Guy Cameron? Is Jack—my Jack—is he my mother's brother?"

Houston bowed in assent, he could not speak.

"Oh," moaned Lyle, "no wonder that he loved us so! and we have not loved him half enough!" and dropping on her knees beside the bed, sobbing bitterly, she seized the hand, nearly as white as the sheet upon which it lay, and covered it with passionate kisses.

A few moments later, Morton Rutherford entered the room; Lyle was still kneeling by the bedside; beside her was Leslie, quietly weeping. Ned's eyes were suspiciously red, while in one corner, honest-hearted Mike was vainly trying to check his fast-flowing tears upon the sleeves of his blouse. Morton looked quickly toward the strangely altered face upon the pillows, and was struck by its wondrous beauty.



Glancing inquiringly at Houston, as he advanced to meet him, he asked anxiously:

"Is he worse?"

"No, there is no change yet, one way or another," Houston replied in low tones, and continued, "Morton, we were speaking last night, at the cabin, of my uncle's son,—my cousin, Guy Cameron."

"Yes, I remember."

"He is found," Houston's voice trembled, and he could say no more, but Morton understood. He gazed with new and tearful interest upon the beautiful face in its death-like calm; then beckoning to Houston, he said, as they passed from the room:

"Ah, you have at last found the key to the wondrous bond between you, and to his self-sacrificing love toward you and yours."

For a few moments they recalled certain incidents in their acquaintance with the silent, yet gentle and courteous occupant of the little cabin, and much that had seemed mysterious was now clear and plain in the light of this recent revelation.

At last Morton said; "I must hasten back to the Y," at the same time handing his friend the telegram received from Van Dorn:

"Leave in half an hour on special, with surgeons and nurse. Whitney and Lindlay remain here to attend to business. Warrants for arrests have been issued."

"That is good," said Houston, with a sigh of relief, "They are already on their way. And now, my dear Morton, I have one other commission for you, if you are willing to perform it."

"You know I am at your service," Morton replied.

"My aunt, whose faith and love have watched and waited for her son's return during all these years, must be brought here as quickly as possible. I am not in very good condition for travel, and do not feel that I can leave Guy. I know I can trust her in your care, you will be to her as a son, and such she will regard you when she knows all, and I commission you in my name to meet her and bring her out here."

"That I will very gladly do, my dear Everard, and at once; there must be no delay. By going out this evening, I will be able to take the early train east from Silver City; the special arrives at 6:10, the six o'clock train being held at the Y, until after its arrival. I will return to the Y, meet Mr. Cameron and have a word with him, and go directly on to Silver City on the regular train."

Thirty minutes later, having hastily packed a small grip, and taken a tender farewell of Lyle, who knew his errand, and with tearful eyes bade him "God-speed," Morton Rutherford left the house, accompanied by Ned, who was to return with Mr. Cameron and Van Dorn.

The sun was slowly sinking behind the crests of the mountains, flooding the surrounding peaks with glory, when a wagon drawn by four panting, foaming horses, drew up before the house.

From the front seat beside the driver, Ned Rutherford and Van Dorn sprang hastily to the ground, turning quickly to assist a fine-looking, elderly gentleman, with iron-gray hair and beard, whose dark, piercing eyes bore a strong resemblance to those of both Houston and Jack. He needed little assistance, however, and having alighted, turned with firm step and erect bearing, but with an expression of deep anxiety, toward the house, followed by the two young men, and by three strangers.

At that instant Houston appeared within the little porch, his left arm in a sling, his face pale and haggard, though with a grave smile of affectionate welcome.

Even in that brief instant, Mr. Cameron could not but observe the change which those few short months had wrought in the face of Everard Houston, the high-born son of wealth and culture, the pet of society; it had matured wonderfully; alert and keen, yet grave and thoughtful, he looked as though he had found a deeper and broader meaning to life than he had ever dreamed of in his luxurious eastern home.

"My boy!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, hastening toward him, "are you sure you have escaped without serious injury?"

"Quite sure," Houston replied, limping slightly, as he advanced to meet his uncle, "my arm was hurt, and I am

somewhat scratched and bruised and a little weak, but otherwise, sound as ever."

"Thank God for that! I don't mind the loss of the property if you are safe; all the way out here, my boy, I have been reproaching myself for ever allowing you to come out to this country."

"My dear uncle," Houston replied, with peculiar emphasis, "I think you will soon find you have reason to be very glad and grateful that I came."

Mr. Cameron introduced the two surgeons and the nurse; "I feared," he said, "from your sending for these gentlemen that you might be hurt far more seriously than I knew."

"No," said Houston, "but the one who has nearly sacrificed his own life in helping to save mine, needs their best skill, and I sent for them on his account."

"That was right," replied Mr. Cameron, "all that money can do shall be done for him," while one of the surgeons said, "We will see our patient at once, Mr. Houston, if you please."

"You will see him very soon," Houston replied with grave courtesy, "but there are reasons why my uncle must first see him, and alone."

Mr. Cameron looked surprised, but silently followed Houston into the room which had been occupied by the two brothers, but which was now prepared for him. Then observing something peculiar in Houston's manner as he closed the door, he asked:

"What is it, my boy?"

"Pardon me, if I seem abrupt, uncle," Houston answered, "but every moment is precious in saving a life unspeakably dear to each of us."

Mr. Cameron looked startled; Houston continued:

"You have been like a father to me all these years, and I have felt toward you as a son, but to-day I have the joy of bringing you to the one, who holds in your heart, and always will hold, precedence even over myself."

"Everard, my boy!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, in tones vibrating with suppressed emotion, "what is it? Speak quickly, do not keep me in suspense."

"My dear uncle," said Houston very tenderly, "the lost is found."

Mr. Cameron sank, nearly overcome, into the nearest chair, while his face grew deathly white.

"Guy?" he gasped, looking upward at Houston.

"Yes," said the latter brokenly.

The strong man covered his face with his hands, while his powerful frame shook with emotion.

Houston, when he was able to speak, told him, very briefly, of his meeting with Jack, of their association, and the strange bond of sympathy and affection between them, of Jack's devotion, and how at last, he had been enabled to recognize him.

Controlling himself with a mighty effort, Mr. Cameron rose, saying:

"Take me to him."

Opening the door connecting the two rooms, Houston signaled to those within to leave the room, then led the father into the presence of the son whom he had so long mourned as dead.

Mr. Cameron walked to the bedside, and looked long and earnestly upon the white face, drawn with pain, but still beautiful, and bearing to a great extent, the imprint of his own features; then as he tenderly clasped the hand lying upon the sheet, he murmured brokenly, between great, tearless sobs:

"It is he, my boy, my son! Thank God, it is not too late!"

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

There was a long consultation between the physicians and surgeons following a careful and thorough examination of their patient, before the rendering of their decision.

He had received various injuries of a serious character, but the injury to the head was far the most dangerous of all. There was a possibility that with the most careful nursing and the most skillful medical aid, he might live,

but his recovery was exceedingly doubtful,—one chance out of a hundred.

"Do your best," was Mr. Cameron's reply to this decision, "do your best, regardless of cost; if you wish counsel, have it; send out another nurse, the best you can secure, to relieve this one, and I wish one or the other of you gentlemen to remain here constantly, we must not be left without a physician. I may as well inform you now," Mr. Cameron added, with great dignity, in conclusion, "that your patient is my son."

Astonishment was depicted upon the faces of the physicians, but Mr. Cameron continued:

"For some months my nephew has been out here incognito, engaged in unearthing the dishonest schemes and plots of the mining company who constituted our western agents, and I have just discovered that he was aided in this work by my son, who, unknown to me, was out here in disguise, working with the same end in view. You will, of course, understand, gentlemen, that money is no object; do everything within your power, and you shall be abundantly compensated."

Thus it was arranged that one or two physicians were constantly at the house, and when these returned to Silver City for a few hours, others took their places.

A competent cook and housekeeper were also sent out from Silver City, as the excitement resulting from the terrible events of that day, together with her husband's connection therewith, which had in some way become generally known, proved too much for the feeble strength of Mrs. Maverick, and she was prostrated by the shock.

Minty, terror-stricken by the results which she believed had followed her report to Haight, and by his fearful fate, in a fit of hysteria, confessed the share she had taken in the plot, and was summarily dismissed.

After the coming of Mr. Cameron with the surgeons and nurse, Lyle and Leslie had withdrawn from the sick-room, and busied themselves in caring for Mrs. Maverick, and in superintendence of the necessary work; Van Dorn, whose astonishment at the revelations of the last two days was beyond expression, keeping them informed of the condition of the sufferer. Lyle was pale with excitement,

but calmly and bravely took her place as head of the strangely assorted household, her heart throbbing wildly as she anticipated the meeting with Mr. Cameron.

Within the sickroom the soft, gray twilight had deepened into darkness. At one side of the bed sat the nurse, his fingers upon the pulse of the patient, while he listened attentively to his breathing, now becoming irregular, and broken by low moans and occasional mutterings. On the other side sat Mr. Cameron, his head bowed upon his hands, his mind going back to the years of Guy's childhood and youth. How vividly he recalled many little incidents, seemingly trivial when they occurred, but carefully treasured among the most precious memories in the long, sad years that followed! With the memory of his son, his heart's pride and joy, came also that of the beautiful daughter, with her golden hair and starry eyes, the light of their home in those happy days.

Mr. Cameron seemed lost in thought, but in reality, while thus reviewing the past, his mind was keenly conscious of the present. In one corner sat the faithful Mike, while at his feet lay the equally faithful Rex, who could be neither coaxed nor driven from the room, but remained quietly watching his master's face, an almost human love and sorrow looking out of his eyes, as he answered the occasional moans with a low, piteous whine.

In another corner Everard talked in low tones with the two physicians who were to remain that night, Mr. Cameron taking cognizance, in the midst of his own sorrowful thoughts, of every word.

At length some one called for a light, and a moment later, Mr. Cameron was conscious of a light step crossing the room, and of a lamp being placed on the table near the physicians, though none of its rays fell in the direction of the sufferer. Lifting his head, he saw the lamp with a screen so attached as to throw a shade over almost the entire room, leaving only a small portion lighted; but within that brightly illumined portion he had a glimpse, for an instant, of a face, which with its radiant eyes and its shining aureole of golden hair, was so nearly a counterpart of the one but just recalled so vividly to his mind, that it seemed a living reproduction

of the same. Only a glimpse, for as he started, wondering if it could be a figment of his own imagination, the face suddenly vanished into the shadow, and the figure glided from the room. Still it haunted him; could there have been a real resemblance? or was it only a hallucination of his own?

About an hour later, Houston, who had observed I is uncle's involuntary start of surprise on seeing Lyle, and who was anxious that he should learn the truth as early as possible, slipping his arm within that of his uncle's, led him out upon the porch, where they lighted their cigars, smoking for a few moments in silence, then talking together in low tones of the one so dear to each of them, while Houston related the details of his first meeting and early acquaintance with the miner, Jack.

"Even if Guy cannot recover," said Mr. Cameron, in tremulous tones, when Houston had finished, "Yet if he lives long enough to see and recognize his mother and myself, and realize our feeling for him—even then, I shall be more than repaid for your coming out here,—though all else were lost."

"Indeed you would," responded Houston, "but I cannot help feeling that Guy's life will be spared, that he will live to bless your future years. But my dear uncle," he continued, very slowly, "although you are yet unaware of it, you have nearly as much, if not an equal cause for joy in another direction."

"I do not understand you, Everard; you surely do not allude to the property?"

"No, very far from that; did you notice the young girl who came into Guy's room to-night?"

"To bring the light?"

"The same."

"Yes, and I intended to inquire of you concerning her. Her face impressed me strangely; I cannot tell whether it was a fact or my own imagination, but I had been thinking of the children,—Guy and his sister,—as they were years ago, and it seemed to me that her face, as I saw it for an instant, was almost an exact counterpart of my own Edna's, as she used to look, even to the hair and eyes which were very peculiar."

"It was no imagination on your part, the resemblance is very marked, not only in face, but in voice and manner as well."

"How do you account for it?" asked Mr. Cameron quickly, "Who is she?"

"She is the one who, of all the world, would have the best right to resemble your daughter," replied Houston; then, in answer to Mr. Cameron's look of perplexed inquiry, he continued:

"Pardon me, uncle, for any painful allusion, but at the time of my cousin's death, I believe you had no direct proof as to the fate of her child?"

"No absolute proof, of course," replied Mr. Cameron, "only the testimony of those who identified the mother, that there was no child with her, and no child among any of those saved answering to the description given, from which we naturally supposed the little one to have been killed outright. Why, Everard," he exclaimed, as a new thought occurred to him, "you certainly do not think this Edna's child, do you?"

"Why might it not be possible?" inquired Houston, wishing to lead his uncle gradually up to the truth.

"Is this her home?" asked Mr. Cameron in turn.

"Yes," said Houston, "this has been her home, I believe, for the last ten years."

"If the supposition mentioned a moment ago were correct, how would she be here, amid such surroundings?"

"Do you know the man who runs this house?" Houston asked.

"A man by the name of Maverick had charge of it when I was out here years ago; I do not know whether he is still here."

"He is; do you know him? Did you ever have any business with him personally?"

"Yes, I had him in my employ years ago, in the east, and was obliged to discharge him for dishonesty."

"Thereby incurring his life-long hatred and enmity, so that years afterward, he sought to wreak his revenge upon you by stealing from the wrecked train, where your daughter lost her life, the little child who would otherwise have been your solace in that time of bereavement."



"Everard!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, "are you sure you are correct? What proof have you of this?"

"The proofs were not discovered until recently," Houston replied, "although we knew that they existed, but now this girl has found a letter from Maverick's wife confessing the whole crime, and stating that it was committed through a spirit of revenge; and she also has in her possession the articles of clothing she wore at the time she was stolen, together with a locket containing her mother's picture and her own name,—Marjorie Lyle Washburn."

"That is enough," said Mr. Cameron briefly, "let me see her, Everard."

Houston stepped within the house, reappearing a few moments later, with Lyle. Very beautiful she looked as she came forward in the soft radiance of the moonlight, a child-like confidence shining in the lovely eyes.

Mr. Cameron rose to meet her, and taking both her hands within his own, he stood for an instant, gazing into the beautiful face.

"My dear child, my own Edna!" he said in broken tones, folding her closely within his arms, "Thank God for another child restored to us from the dead!"

Houston returned to the sick-room, leaving Mr. Cameron and Lyle in their new-found joy. Lyle told him briefly the story of her life, his eyes growing stern with indignation as he listened to the wrongs she had endured, then luminous with tenderness, as she told of Jack's affectionate care for her.

"Call me 'papa' my child, as you used to in the days of your babyhood," he said, kissing her, as they rose to return to Guy's room, "you never even then, would call Mrs. Cameron or myself anything but 'mamma' and 'papa,' and now you shall be as our own child!"

Together they watched beside the sick-bed until the morning sun touched the mountain peaks with glory, but there came no relief to the sufferer, now moaning and tossing in delirium.

Eastward, across the mountain ranges, Morton Ruth-erford was speeding swiftly, scarcely heeding in his sorrow and anxiety, the grandeur and beauty through which

he was passing; while from Chicago, the sweet-faced mother was hastening westward, all unconscious that she was being swiftly and surely borne to the answer of her prayers,—that in that distant western country to which she was journeying, her son lay calling her in his fever and delirium.

She had started in response to a dispatch from Morton Rutherford, at Silver City:

“Mr. Cameron and Everard Houston safe and well, but wish you to come out immediately. Wire where I will meet you in St. Paul. Will explain when I see you.

“Morton Rutherford.”

The mining camp that morning, presented a strange scene of idleness and desolation. Many of the mines were in ruins, while the remainder were shut down.

They would remain shut down for an indefinite period, Houston told the men who had gathered about the house for information. The officers of the company, he further stated, had been arrested and their property would soon be seized, hence it would be impossible to state when the mines would be reopened. It was probable that with the next spring, an entirely new corporation would be organized, and the mining and milling plant rebuilt, and operated on a much more extensive scale than before; and should this be the case, he would then and there vouch that those of his men who had proven themselves trustworthy and honorable, would be certain of work, should they desire it, in the newly opened mines.

The men knew of Jack's condition, and while not a sound was made that would disturb the sufferer, the better class swung their hats high in the air, in token of applause, and then walked silently away.

It was found in the succeeding days that several miners had lost their lives in the explosions of the Yankee Boy mine; a few were so far underground that their doom was inevitable, while others, whom Houston had warned, instead of following his instructions, had endeavored to escape through the shafts, and had discovered too late that they had only rushed on to certain death.

Maverick, the tool by which all this destruction had been wrought, after his deadly work was done, overcome by his wretched cowardice, remained concealed until a late hour; then creeping from his hiding place to gloat over the havoc and ruin he had wrought, he suddenly found his triumph was short. Under the shelter of a few boards, temporarily erected, he found the ghastly remains of his companion and director in crime. Shivering and trembling with fear, he crept up the road till within sight of the house, arriving just in time to see Houston,—whom he supposed crushed and buried within the mine,—presenting Lyle to Mr. Cameron. He lingered long enough to see her clasped in his arms, then skulked back into the shadow, retreating down the road, gnashing his teeth with rage and disappointment. The following day search was made for him, under instructions from Mr. Cameron and Houston, who offered a large reward for him, living or dead. His body was found in an old, abandoned shaft on the mountain side, riddled with bullets. The vengeance of the miners, desperate from the loss of homes and employment, had overtaken him first. He was buried hastily and with little ceremony, his two sons having already taken themselves to parts unknown, fearful lest the penalty of their father's crimes might be inflicted upon them, and his fate become theirs also. A day or two later, Mrs. Maverick, who had been prostrated by the shock of the explosions and the succeeding events, died from a sudden paralysis, her feeble mind having first been cheered and soothed by the assurance from Mr. Cameron of his forgiveness for the small share which she had taken in the withholding Lyle from her true friends and home. She was given a decent burial in the miners' little cemetery at the Y, and the house which for so many years had been called by their name, knew the Mavericks no more.

Kind hands laid little Bull-dog under the murmuring pines on the mountain side, near Morgan's last resting place, but in the hearts of Houston and his friends, his memory could never grow dim.

The small community of miners suddenly vanished, the deserted quarters, with their blackened ruins, seem-

ing little like the busy camp of but a few days before, resounding with their songs and jests.

Only in the house nestling at the foot of the mountain there were no signs of desertion. It was crowded to overflowing, and within its walls, during those next succeeding days, what combats were waged, between hope and fear, joy and despair, life and death!

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

Five days had passed, days of raging fever and delirium so violent that already the powerful frame seemed nearly exhausted; the sufferer calling almost incessantly for the loved ones of his old home, but oftenest for his mother. Some faint glimmer of recognition must occasionally have reached those darkened chambers of the brain, since when attended by Mr. Cameron, Houston or Lyle, he rested more quietly, though never calling Lyle by her own name, but always by that of his sister, Edna.

The fever had subsided, and he was now rapidly passing into a death-like stupor, hovering between life and death, unconscious of skilled physicians and trained nurses that came and went, unconscious of loving friends bending above him, their prayers and efforts combined with the skill of the former, in the terrible combat against the mighty foe.

The physicians watching by the bedside, shook their heads, as they felt the pulse, fluttering more and more faintly.

"He is sinking, failing rapidly," they said, "to-night will be the crisis, the turning point; unless there is a change then for the better, he will never see the dawning of another day."

To Mrs. Cameron, journeying westward with Morton Rutherford, the moments had seemed like hours, the hours like days, since learning for whose sake had come the summons to that distant country. Only the speed of the lightning could have satisfied the heart of the mother hastening to her long-lost son.

They had been kept informed along the route of Guy's condition, and now, upon their arrival at Silver City, on the noon train, they found a special car awaiting them, to convey them at once to the Y, which had been ordered by telegraphic dispatch from Mr. Cameron.

The watchers by the bedside heard the sound of swiftly approaching wheels; Mr. Cameron and Houston stepped quickly out to greet the sweet-faced woman hastening toward the house on the arm of Morton Rutherford.

"Am I in time? Is our boy still living?" were her first words, as her husband met her with outstretched arms, his face working with deep emotion.

"Just in time, thank God!" was the broken reply.

"Oh, Walter, is there no hope?" she queried, understanding his words only too well.

"I must not deceive you, Marjorie, there is the barest possibility that he may live, no more."

"He must live, and he will," replied the mother, in tones that reminded both Houston and Morton Rutherford wonderfully of Lyle.

Turning toward Houston, Mrs. Cameron greeted him affectionately, and gently touching the wounded arm, exclaimed:

"My poor, dear boy, what a terrible risk you have run!"

To which he replied, "I would go through it all again, Aunt Marjorie, for the joy I believe it will bring you and yours."

A few moments later, Mr. Cameron led his wife into the sick-room. Lyle had already left the room, and there remained only Leslie Gladden, sitting quietly near the foot of the bed, and the nurse, who respectfully withdrew from his place beside the patient, as Mrs. Cameron approached.

Calmly, though through fast-falling tears, the mother gazed for a moment upon her son; then dropping upon her knees beside the bed, she slipped one arm underneath the pillows, and gently drew the wounded head upon her own breast, tenderly kissing the brow and cheeks; then taking his hand within her own, she stroked and caressed

it, meanwhile crooning over him in low, murmuring tones, as though he had been an infant.

There were no dry eyes in that little room, not excepting even the nurse, while from the door-way of the adjoining room, Morton Rutherford, Lyle and Everard Houston watched the scene with hearts too full for utterance. Something in that gentle touch must have carried the troubled mind of the sufferer back to the days of his childhood; gradually the faint moaning ceased, the drawn, tense features relaxed, and a sweet, child-like smile stole over his face now assuming a death-like pallor.

For hours the mother knelt there, her husband by her side, Everard and Leslie standing near, while in the background, in the dim light, was Lyle with Morton Rutherford.

At last, Mr. Cameron, bending over his wife, entreated her to take a few moments' rest and a little food. She hesitated, but Everard spoke:

"You must take some refreshment, Aunt Marjorie, you have had no food for hours; Leslie and I will watch here, and if there should be the slightest change, I will call you."

At the name of Leslie, Mrs. Cameron looked up, with a sweet, motherly smile, into the beautiful but tear-stained face beside her, and gently withdrawing from the bedside, she turned and clasped Miss Gladden in her arms, saying:

"My dear Leslie, I did not think we would meet for the first time under such circumstances as these, but I am more than glad to find you here. Everard has always been, and still is as our own son, and I welcome you, my dear, as a daughter."

On entering the dining-room, Mr. and Mrs. Cameron found a most tempting luncheon prepared for them, but no one in the room, Lyle having judged they would prefer to be by themselves for awhile.

As Mrs. Cameron, having partaken of some slight refreshment, was preparing to return to the sick-room, her husband said:

"Wait a moment, my dear; there is another joy in store

for you, Marjorie, in that, through Everard's coming out into this country, we have received back from the dead, as it were, not only our son, but also a daughter. I want you to meet her now, my dear, so prepare yourself for a great surprise, and perhaps, something of a shock."

"I do not understand you, dear," replied Mrs. Cameron, looking bewildered, "you certainly do not refer to Leslie, I have met her."

"No, my love, Leslie is a beautiful girl, and will be to us a lovely daughter, but I refer to a daughter of our own flesh and blood."

Stepping to an adjoining room, Mr. Cameron called in a low tone, "Lyle, my dear," returning immediately to his wife's side to support her in case the shock should prove too much in her present agitated condition.

Lyle glided into the room, slowly approaching Mrs. Cameron, who sat speechless, pale as death, but controlling herself by a visible effort.

"Edna, my child! my own Edna!" she cried, rising with outstretched arms, and clasping Lyle to her breast; then turning toward her husband, she asked:

"What does this mean, Walter? Can this be Edna's child?"

"Yes, my love," he replied, "this is the little Marjorie we have mourned as dead for so many years."

For a while they sat clasped in each other's arms, their tears commingling, while Mr. Cameron briefly explained to his wife the main facts in Lyle's strange history.

"She shall be our own daughter, shall she not, Walter? She shall be to us just what Edna was?"

"Certainly," was the response, "she is our own daughter, Marjorie Lyle Cameron."

They returned to Guy's room, Mrs. Cameron resuming her old place, with Guy's head upon her breast, his hand in hers, only that now Lyle knelt beside her. At their side, and very near his son, was Mr. Cameron, while just back of them were Everard, Leslie and Morton Rutherford. Ned Rutherford and Van Dorn lingered in the door-way watching, while at the foot of the bed stood Mike, the tears coursing down his rugged face. On the other side of the bed stood the physicians and nurse,

their keen eyes watching the subtle changes passing over the face, now white as marble, and almost as motionless.

Fainter and shorter grew the gasping breaths, more and more feeble the pulse, until at last it was evident to every one within that little room, that life had very nearly ebbed away.

But there was one who did not, for one instant, lose faith or hope. The sublime faith which had upheld her through all those years of a sorrow greater than death, did not desert her now. Lyle seemed to share her faith, and they alone remained calm and tearless, the saint-like face of the mother shining with love and trust.

Suddenly, upon that death-like stillness, her voice rang out, with startling clearness:

"Guy! oh, Guy, my darling!"

And to that soul, slipping through the fast-darkening shadows, almost within the grasp of the great enemy, there seemed to have come some echo of those tones, with their piercing sweetness, recalling him to life; for, with a long, quivering breath, Guy slowly opened his eyes, gazing, for an instant, with a dreamy smile, upon the faces surrounding him. His eyes closed with a gentle sigh, but while those about him anxiously awaited the next breath, they again opened, full of the light of recognition, while a rapturous smile grew and deepened upon his face, irradiating his features with joy, his lips moving in a whisper so faint that only the mother's ear could catch the words:

"I thought—it was—all—a dream,—but—it—is true," then, exhausted, he sank into a deep sleep like a child's, his breathing growing more and more regular and natural, moment by moment.

The physicians withdrew from the bedside, their vigil was over; "He will live," they said briefly, while in response, there rose from all parts of the room, deep sobs of joy.



## CHAPTER XLIX.

For the first week or two, Guy Cameron's recovery was slow, but at the expiration of that time his vigorous constitution reasserted itself, and he gained rapidly.

Meanwhile, at Silver City, affairs were progressing under the efficient management of Mr. Whitney, the clear-headed attorney from New York.

When orders for arrest were first issued, it was soon discovered that the office of the North Western Mining, Land & Investment Company was practically deserted. None of their books or papers were to be found, their clerks had been dismissed, and no trace existed of the officers of the company. No information regarding their whereabouts could be obtained from any of the officers of the several high-titled companies occupying the same room, as they were supremely and serenely unconscious that anything out of the usual order had occurred, and full of regrets that they were unable to furnish the desired information.

Blaisdell was discovered the following day, in company with his eldest son, in an old abandoned mine about two miles from town, which he claimed they were working, his limited means not allowing him to wander far from the scene of his crimes. He was brought back to town and held pending the discovery of Wilson and Rivers, for whom detectives were searching in every direction. The former was never found, but at the end of about two weeks, the latter was run to earth in an eastern city, where he was masquerading in snow-white wig and beard and colored eye-glasses, as a retired and invalid clergyman, living in great seclusion.

Blaisdell and Rivers were tried on the charge of murder, the most important witnesses for the prosecution being Everard Houston and Morton Rutherford; the latter testifying as to the nature of the final and fatal dispatch sent on that eventful day, in which he was corroborated

by the telegraph operator of the Silver City office, who had been found and secured as a witness, and who verified Rutherford's statements regarding the message, but at the same time cleared Mr. Blaisdell from all connection therewith; the message having been sent by Rivers in Blaisdell's absence, whether with his knowledge and consent, they were unable to ascertain. The charge against Blaisdell was therefore dismissed through lack of evidence, while in Rivers' case, a verdict was returned for manslaughter, and he was given the extreme limit of the law, imprisonment for ten years.

Blaisdell was then speedily arraigned for a new trial on the charge of embezzlement, the date on which his case was set for hearing being the same as that upon which his partner in crime was to be transferred to the state penitentiary.

On that morning, however, the guard on going to the cell occupied by Rivers, found him just expiring, having succeeded in smuggling into his cell a quantity of morphine, how or when, no one could ascertain. He left a letter in which he stated that no state penitentiary had ever held him, or ever would, but that "as the game was up" he would give them a few particulars regarding his past life. He gave his true name, the name of a man who, twenty-five years before, had been wanted in the state of New York for a heavy bank robbery and murder. For years, under an alias, he had belonged to a gang of counterfeiters in Missouri, but upon the discovery and arrest of the leaders of the band, he had assumed his present alias and had come west.

As Blaisdell took his place that morning in the prisoner's box, he was a pitiable object. Haunted almost to madness by the awful fate of his associate, confronted by an overwhelming array of evidence, furnished by Houston, Van Dorn and Lindlay, including also a deposition of Guy Cameron's, taken in his sick-room, his own abject and hopeless appearance bore the most damaging testimony against him. His case was quickly decided, his sentence being for seven years.

After the trial, Morton Rutherford and Van Dorn returned at once to the camp, and a day or two later, when

business affairs had at last been satisfactorily adjusted, Mr. Cameron and Houston returned, bringing with them Mr. Whitney and Lindlay, for a visit of a week among the mountains, before the entire party should return east.

It was now early in the fall. Already the nights were frosty, but the days were royal as only early autumnal days among the mountains can be. Every breath was exhilarating, each inhalation seeming laden with some subtle elixir of life.

Guy Cameron was now convalescent, able to sit with his friends in the low, rustic porch, or even to join them in short strolls among the rocks by the lake.

One afternoon they all sat in and about the porch, in the soft, hazy sunlight, the vines and shrubbery about them brilliant in their autumnal tints of crimson and orange and gold. The group was complete, with the exception of Mr. Cameron and Mr. Whitney, who still lingered within doors, engaged in drawing up some papers of which no one seemed to understand the import, excepting Houston, who had just left the gentlemen to join the group outside.

It was a strikingly beautiful picture; Mrs. Cameron seated in the center, with her sweet face and snow-white hair, and on either side a lovely daughter. Near Lyle were seated Guy Cameron and Morton Rutherford,—between whom there already existed a deep affinity,—with their faces of remarkable strength and beauty. On the grass, just outside the porch, in various easy attitudes, were Ned Rutherford, Van Dorn and Lindlay, and it was noticeable that under the influence of late events, even Ned's boyish face was gradually assuming a far more mature and thoughtful expression.

As Houston seated himself beside Leslie, both she and Lyle observed that his face was lighted with a smile of deep satisfaction, but he remained silent, and the conversation continued as before, the members of the little group engaged in anticipations of their return to their respective homes, and in comments upon this particular portion of the west with which they had become familiar.

"Which will you love best, Jack, my dear," Lyle asked of Guy in low tones, using the old form of address still

very dear to her, "the eastern home, or the mountains?"

"My old home was never so dear to me as now," he replied, "but I am deeply attached to the mountains; for years they were my only friends, and I shall wish to look upon them occasionally in the future."

"Well," Ned Rutherford was saying, "I wouldn't have thought it, but I've got so attached to this place out here, I'd like an excuse of some sort,—some kind of business, you know,—that would bring me here part of the time; what do you think, Mort?"

"I think our associations here have had a great deal to do with the attractions of the place, but as a quiet retreat in which to spend a few weeks of each summer, I can not imagine a more delightful place."

"Everard, of what are you thinking so deeply?" demanded Lyle, watching his thoughtful face, "you have not spoken a word since you came out."

"I am thinking of the evening when first we had Mr. Lindlay and Mr. Van Dorn as guests in this house; thinking of the contrast between then and now; that was ushering in the close of the old regime, and this is the eve of the new."

"When will the mines be reopened?" inquired Van Dorn.

"Just as soon as possible after the rebuilding of the plant, next spring."

"All these mines will be owned and controlled by the New York company, will they not?"

"Yes, and they will probably purchase other good properties."

"'Pon my soul, but that will make a fine plant, out 'ere!" exclaimed Lindlay.

"I should say so," responded Van Dorn.

Just at that instant, Mr. Cameron and Mr. Whitney appeared, the latter carrying a large roll of legal cap, covered with his well-known hieroglyphics.

"My dear," said Mr. Cameron, seating himself beside his wife and a little in the rear of the remainder of the group, "Mr. Whitney and myself have been engaged in drawing up the articles of incorporation of the new mining company to be organized out here very shortly, and I

thought perhaps you and the young people would be interested in them. I want to say that they are drawn up subject to the approval of all parties interested, and after you have heard them read, we want you to express your opinions, jointly and severally. Mr. Whitney, as I believe you are the only one who would be able to read those cabalistic signs, we will now listen to you."

Amid a general laugh at Mr. Whitney's expense, he began the reading of the articles of incorporation. The first article, setting forth the object of the corporation, was read, and by the time Mr. Whitney had reached the second, the members of the party were all attention.

"Article II. This corporation shall be known as The Rocky Mountain Mining Company."

A murmur of approval ran through the little group, and the sonorous tones continued:

"Article III. The officers of the company hereby incorporated shall be as follows: Walter E. Cameron, president; Walter E. Houston, vice-president; Guy M. Cameron, treasurer and general manager; Edward B. Rutherford, Jr., secretary."

Mr. Cameron, from his post of observation, watching to see the effect produced by the reading of this document, did not have to wait long. The faces of the ladies expressed their delight, while Ned Rutherford was speechless with astonishment; but it was the figure half reclining in the invalid chair that he watched most closely; it was his son's approval that he most desired.

At the mention of his name, Guy Cameron had given a slight start, but he now lay with closed eyes, the only sign of emotion visible being that his pale face had grown still paler. Only the preceding day, Guy and his parents had held their first and only conversation together regarding the time so long past, Mr. and Mrs. Cameron intending it to be the first and last allusion which should be made to that sad time. Guy well knew that all was forgiven; he knew that the unhappy secret had been guarded with such loving care that his reputation was untarnished, there was nothing to be recalled against him on his return; yet he would consent only to a brief visit to the old home; he would not yet return permanently.

"Let me first go into business somewhere, and retrieve myself in my own eyes at least," he had said, "not be taken back as a prodigal."

Mr. Cameron had conferred with Houston, and both hoped that a responsible position in the newly organized company, amid the old familiar scenes and work, and associated with those to whom he had become personally attached, would more than meet his wishes. Mr. Cameron had wished to make him general manager on account of his familiarity with the business, while Houston wished him to hold the office of treasurer, as token of their perfect trust; hence the two were combined.

After all the articles of incorporation had been read in full, the little group broke up, and crowded around the newly-chosen young officers with many congratulations.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Ned, "I never was so thunder struck in my life! Accept it? well, I should say so, Mr. Cameron, and with many thanks; you couldn't have picked out anything that would suit me better. I guess," he added in a confidential aside to Houston, "I guess that will fix the old fellow down there in Boston all right."

Guy grasped his father's hand and Houston's in a manner that removed every anxiety from their minds.

"It is more than satisfactory," he said, "more than I could wish."

The following day, Mr. Whitney, Lindlay and Van Dorn returned east, leaving the "family party" as they laughingly styled themselves, to follow later.

Among the pleasant surprises of those last few days of their stay, it was discovered that Leslie Gladden, whom Mrs. Cameron and Lyle had urged to make her home with them upon their return, was the owner of a palatial residence not many blocks from their own city home, besides having a snug little fortune in bonds and stocks.

Houston's surprise was unbounded, but remembering how he had won Leslie's love, there was little he could say.

"I thought you once said you never had a home of your own," he remarked in considerable perplexity.

"Well," she replied archly, "a residence is not necessarily a home; it has never been a home to me since my

earliest recollection, but it will be one soon, in the truest sense of the word."

One morning a few days later, they awoke to find the mountains about them white with snow, and a light snow-fall in the canyon; and though the latter vanished presently under the balmy breath of a "chinook," it had given them warning that the winter king was approaching, and would soon seize the scepter from autumn's hand, to begin his long reign among the mountains.

That day, the old house which had witnessed such varied scenes within the past few months, was closed, and a very joyous party started for Silver City, the initial point of the long eastward journey, their hearts throbbing with delight that they were homeward bound.

In the first carriage rode Mr. and Mrs. Cameron and their newly-found son and daughter, while following so closely that their merry jokes and song and laughter were intermingled, were Everard Houston, Leslie Gladden and the two brothers; and as they passed down the winding canyon road, casting loving, farewell glances at the friendly peaks, clad that day in dazzling brightness, and recalled their first coming to the heart of the Rockies, they were, one and all, agreed that the end was better than the beginning.

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According to Houston's prediction, the mines were reopened the following year, and operated on a far more extensive scale. On the site of the old mills, an immense building was erected, thoroughly equipped with the latest improvements in mining machinery and electrical and mechanical appliances. The old mines were repaired and extended and new properties were purchased, giving employment to hundreds of men. Early in the second year, a railroad was constructed by the company, extending up the canyon from the Y, to the camp, for the transportation of ore, mining supplies, freight and passengers.

As the mines were enlarged and new properties developed, quite a community sprang up in that vicinity, which, after the construction of the railroad, speedily de-

veloped into a typical mining town; and now, after a lapse of three years, few would recognize the old camp.

Half way up the steep grade from the Y, is the smelting plant of the company, while at the terminus of the road, are the long, stone storehouses, at one end of which is the general office and a pleasant reception room. Next comes the great milling and reduction plant, while just beyond are the offices of the company, a fine, three-story brick building. From this building can be seen, in one direction the extensive mining works, with their labyrinth of shafts and tunnels, diggings and dumps; while in another direction are stretched the homes of the miners, the boarding houses, and, at a little distance, the post-office, hotel, stores and shops of the little town, as well as a tasteful church and school house. As one gazes upon the peaceful picture of the mountain town, there is nothing to recall the frightful scene of destruction and ruin of only three years past.

There is little to remind one of former times, until, having followed the broad, winding road for some distance, one suddenly comes upon a familiar sight. Nestling at the foot of the pine-covered mountain, on the site of the old boarding house, is a beautiful, wide-spreading stone cottage, so built that its numerous bow-windows take in a view of the azure lake and shining cascades, as well as of the surrounding peaks and the sunset sky; and on the broad, vine-covered veranda, is a well-known group, who come from their distant, city homes, to spend a few weeks of each summer amid the grandeur and beauty of the mountains, to listen to the whispering of the pines and the music of the cascades.

Morton Rutherford and his bride are here; Lyle, physically and mentally developed into royal, radiant womanhood, more beautiful than ever, but to whom there comes occasionally an irresistible longing to revisit her old mountain home, for the years of happiness and love have obliterated all bitter memories of the loveless, joyless childhood, and only the remembrance of its beauty remains.

By her side, is Guy Cameron, his proud, erect bearing showing the change which these few years have wrought



in his life; lonely and solitary no longer, for near him is a queenly woman, who, knowing the sad secret of his past, will share and brighten his future.

Everard Houston and his lovely wife need no introduction, but, beside them is a little stranger, possessing Leslie's wondrous dark eyes, but Houston's features,—another little Marjorie,—while beside the wee maiden is a small chevalier, only two months her senior, rejoicing in the name of Morton Rutherford. In the dignified, business-like face of the proud father, it is difficult to recognize the former Ned Rutherford, but while possessing still the same light-hearted nature, yet the responsibilities intrusted to him, and the years of constant association with a man like Everard Houston, have developed a business ability surprising even to himself. As secretary of the Rocky Mountain Mining Company, he has proved to be the right man in the right place, thereby reflecting much credit upon Houston's insight and good judgment in selecting him for the position. By his side is a fair woman, the "Grace" of whom he used to dream when first he visited the mountains.

Strolling up and down the graveled walks, in consultation regarding the mines, are two figures, one of whom is easily recognized as Arthur Van Dorn, mining expert for the company, and superintendent of the milling and reduction plant. The energetic, business man by his side is M. T. Donovan, superintendent of the entire mining plant, but a second glance is necessary to recognize in him, Mike, the old-time miner, and the faithful friend of Guy Cameron in his years of loneliness. Donovan and Van Dorn present a striking contrast, but they are good friends, and the latter's personation of the former, on a certain occasion, is a standing joke between them.

There is one more familiar figure, not to be omitted, and that is Rex, stretched on the soft grass in an attitude of perfect content, his nose resting on his paws, his eyes fixed on his master's face with the old-time devotion.

Beautiful as this picture may be, it is not quite complete without a glimpse of a far-away, eastern home, where, in the gloaming, beside an open grate, sit a couple with peaceful faces, crowned with snow-white hair. They

have passed the grand summit of middle age, with its broad horizons, where hope and ambition are at their zenith, and together are journeying down the long, gentle declivity; but the clouds of loss and bereavement and pain that gathered about their path in the years gone by, have passed, and the valley before them is flooded with golden light. Their home circle, once broken, is now nearly complete; the once vacant places by the fireside are again filled, and the old home, silent for so many years, again resounds with song and laughter, and echoes once more to the music of childish voices and the patter of little feet.

For hours, they sit talking together of the joys which the late years have brought them; until the moon-light steals in through the open windows, reverently touching their heads with a silvery radiance, at the same time looking down in silent, shining benediction upon the peaceful scene in the heart of the Rockies.

FINIS.















1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and the role of the accounting system in providing reliable financial information. It emphasizes the need for transparency and accountability in financial reporting.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various components of the accounting system, including the general ledger, subsidiary ledgers, and the trial balance. It explains how these components work together to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the financial data.

3. The third part of the document describes the process of preparing financial statements, including the income statement, balance sheet, and cash flow statement. It provides a detailed explanation of the accounting principles and methods used in the preparation of these statements.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the role of the accounting system in managing the company's financial resources and controlling costs. It highlights the importance of budgeting and cost accounting in achieving the company's financial goals.

5. The fifth part of the document concludes by summarizing the key points discussed and emphasizing the overall importance of the accounting system in the success of the company. It encourages the company to continue to improve its accounting practices and maintain the highest standards of financial reporting.

